

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY ONE

When Troubles Come and Stay

James 1:2–12

A trial is a faith test through which endurance has a chance to grow. James has the audacity to say, “Let it grow. Learn from the trial. As a result, maturity develops.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TROUBLE usually strikes when we least expect it. It appears out of the blue, like a cloudburst on a summer day that whips up a furious windstorm and sends us scurrying for cover. A sickness, an auto accident, a job loss, an expensive repair bill. Who hasn't felt the downpour from sudden and unexpected squalls like these?

Most of life's troubles come and go, and the skies soon clear. But some of life's storms come and stay, and they wreak lasting damage—like Hurricane Harvey.

In 2017, this monster, Category 4 hurricane lashed the Gulf Coast of Texas for four dreadful days. The storm dropped 40 inches of rain in some places and flooded vast regions. Lives were lost and whole communities were destroyed. When people were able to return to their homes, they faced months of sifting through soggy belongings and digging through mud and muck as they tried to rebuild.

What do we do when our storm settles in and the consequences stretch for months, even years? A cancer diagnosis. The unexpected loss of a loved one. Domestic violence. A company-shattering lawsuit. Family conflicts that never seem to resolve.



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When Troubles Come and Stay

James 1:2–12

During life's storms, Scripture parts the clouds to reveal a rainbow of hope—God's enduring presence. God does not leave His children to weather times of trouble alone. At just the right moment, He enters our lives to give us courage, strength, guidance and . . . sometimes . . . relief.

What is God's perspective of trials? How does He come alongside His people? How can we find hope in Him? Let's turn to the book of James to find some answers.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, invite the Holy Spirit to illumine your heart with His truth. You may wish to pray like this:

Father, speak to me through the passage of Scripture I study today. Help me understand the truths it contains. I open my ears to hear Your instructions. I open my eyes to see Your hand at work in my life. Lead me in Your path. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Searching the Scriptures is a four-step Bible study method. In the observation phase, we look at what the biblical passage says. The next phase is interpretation, in which we seek to understand the meaning the author intended. Correlation draws on similar passages to understand our passage within the broader biblical context. Finally, application answers the practical question, "How can I put into action the principles I learned?"



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*.



When Troubles Come and Stay

James 1:2–12



Observation: The Basics about Troubles

To observe is simply to pay close attention to the words on the page. Take your time as you read. Notice the action words. Look for commands, statements of truth, contrasts and comparisons, figures of speech, and cause-and-effect. Careful observation is the key to accurate understanding.

The Truth about Troubles—James 1:2–4

Read *James 1:2–4*. How did James address his readers? What does this address indicate about his relationship with them?

In 1:1, James addressed his letter to “Jewish believers scattered abroad.” They were Jewish Christians who had fled to Gentile territory because of persecution in Jerusalem. On the one hand, the Jews hated them for being Christian, but on the other hand, the Gentiles hated them for being Jewish. Hostility stalked them at every turn.

James specifically wrote, “*when* troubles of any kind come your way” (James 1:2, emphasis added). What was he implying?



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James 1:2–12

What purposes for troubles did James describe in *James 1:3–4*?

How We Respond—James 1:5–12

Usually, our first response to trouble is to problem-solve. We lay out options, seek counsel, and jump into action. But what did James tell his readers to do first and how in *1:5–8*?

What encouragement did James offer his impoverished readers, who were the most vulnerable, according to *1:9*?



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James 1:2–12

What warning did he give his wealthy readers, who might be tempted to trust in their power and riches, according to *James 1:10–11*?

Finally, what ultimate hope did James offer in *1:12*?

As I look back over the years, I have learned the value of the lessons I've learned through pain—sometimes coming from failures of my own, sometimes from someone else. I matured through those situations. They were all purposeful. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Consider, Know, Ask, and Endure

In the interpretation phase, we seek to understand the meaning of the passage, so we can formulate principles. Principles are universal and theological truths about God, people, and life. All people can live by such principles regardless of one's culture or circumstances. Let's take a closer look at the meaning of four key words in *James 1:2–5*: *consider*, *know*, *ask*, and *endure*.



When Troubles Come and Stay

James 1:2–12

Consider Trials as Opportunities

Instead of fearing or running from trouble, James commanded us to receive it as “an opportunity for great joy” (James 1:2). He wasn’t telling us to laugh at trouble. That would be a denial of reality and an inappropriate response to tragedy. So, what did James mean?

When we experience trials and troubles, we can move from a negative to a positive mind-set by focusing on what we know to be true, according to Scripture.

Know the Good That Trials Produce

We don’t rejoice in the trial itself but in knowing that God produces good through trials. What golden qualities does the testing of our faith produce, according to *James 1:3–4*? What did he mean by the phrase, “perfect and complete, needing nothing” (1:4)?

Testing deepens our faith, increases our endurance, enhances our character, and builds our maturity. You can’t beat that combination of benefits. All of it comes on the platform of a trial we would have neither chosen nor expected. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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James 1:2–12

Ask God for His Perspective

Frankly, it's not in our nature to see the good in adversity. We need divine insight, so James urged us, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you" (James 1:5). To what does *wisdom* refer in this context? Why is it important we pray with faith "in God alone" and not have "divided loyalty" (1:6)?

Endure Troubles in Faith

In his book, *Clinging to Hope*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll defines the Greek word for *endure*, which appears three times in the passage.

The term comes from two Greek words, *hypo*, meaning "under," and *meno*, meaning "to abide" or "to remain." It implies persevering under extreme difficulty.¹

What gives us the strength to persevere? Our hope that God blesses "those who patiently endure testing and temptation" and will someday give "the crown of life" to those who endure (James 1:12). What does "the crown of life" mean? For help with the answer, consult your Bible resources, such as Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*. An excellent online resource is *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

When we handle trials God's way rather than in the flesh, there is a sense of satisfaction from the blessings of God. Our character is being cultivated, and the benefits will be ours long-term. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Troubles Come and Stay

James 1:2–12



Correlation: The Promise of Crowns

In correlation, we look for supportive passages to enhance our understanding. Look up the passages in Scripture that describe five crowns, or future rewards that await believers, and write down the name of each crown.

1 Corinthians 9:25–27: _____

1 Thessalonians 2:19 _____

2 Timothy 4:8: _____

James 1:12: _____

1 Peter 5:3–4: _____

What blessings await those who love the Lord! In light of what you've learned in this study, how should we view our trials? Write down an overarching principle, weaving together the concepts of *consider*, *know*, *ask*, and *endure*. This principle can guide you the next time you encounter troubles that come and stay.

God knows your trial, and He is deliberately leading you through it. I urge you to let it run its course. Seek His mind as you ask for wisdom and know that He is at work cultivating a depth of character that you would otherwise miss. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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James 1:2–12



Application: Next Steps to Handling Troubles

What troubles are you currently enduring?

How can you apply the principle you wrote about God's plan for handling trials based on James 1:2–12?

What hope can you cling to today?



When Troubles Come and Stay

James 1:2–12

Many of the severe trials we face involve physical infirmity. So, in the next two studies, we focus exclusively on the subject of healing—which is our most basic hope. We all hope God will heal us when we suffer, and, as we will discover, God’s Word has precious truths to teach about God’s restorative care.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for not abandoning us in our trials but for walking with us as our Good Shepherd. You comfort, protect, and strengthen us as we depend on You. In the end, You guide us to the place of our final blessing—the reward of our forever home with You. Today, I contentedly rely on Your plan for my life, whatever that may be and wherever You may lead. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Clinging to Hope: What Scripture Says about Weathering Times of Trouble, Chaos, and Calamity* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2022), 16.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY TWO

When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

What can we say to those who hoped for healing but were never healed? They need answers based on the Word of God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAS a serious illness afflicted you or someone you love? Or has an accident left you or a family member with a disability? Or has an emotional trauma caused deep depression or spiritual turmoil?

If so, you need hope . . . *but what do you hope for . . . and whom do you hope in?*

Some hang their hope on self-proclaimed miracle workers. Desperately ill, they travel long distances and spend their life savings chasing a dream of restored health. Sadly, when healing never comes, a cloud of disillusionment darkens their souls and their hope crumbles. They wonder, *Why didn't God heal?* Maybe they lacked faith. Perhaps they used the wrong prayer technique or harbored some unconfessed sin.

To clear the fog of confusion about sickness and healing, we must go straight to God's Word. Accounts of miracles leap off the pages of Scripture, so we know that God can heal. And yet, we still have questions. Does God heal people today as He did in the past? If so, why doesn't God heal me and those I love? Why do so many people suffer?

Let's begin our search for answers by laying a row of theological truths on which to construct a solid hope in God.



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, lay out before the Lord what heartache or pain you may have. Draw near to Him in prayer so you can feel His peace and find answers from His Word.

Father, suffering is a real issue in my life. With a humble desire to know Your heart, I acknowledge that Your ways are higher than mine, and I trust You with the mysteries of heaven that elude my grasp . . . but I seek answers. I come to You for wisdom, comfort, assurance, guidance, and peace from Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, James assured us that, someday, God will issue His weary children “the crown of life” (James 1:12) when Christ returns to renew all things and cleanse His creation of suffering, sickness, and sin.

Until then, we live in a fallen world—the tragic aftermath of Adam and Eve’s disobedience (Genesis 3:1–24). Understanding how their original sin relates to sickness and healing is vital to knowing where to place our hope.



Observation: Four Foundational Passages

In the initial phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we observe what the Bible says without shading the words with our own opinions. Notice contrasts and comparisons, repetitions, and key statements that you can come back to in the interpretation phase.

Sin

David traced the origin of his sin to what point in time, according to *Psalms 51:5*?



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

How did Paul explain the origin of all human depravity in *Romans 5:12*?

Sickness

How did David say his sin impacted him physically in *Psalms 32:3–5*?

What assumption did the disciples make about the reason for the man's sight impairment in *John 9:1–3*?
How did Jesus respond?

On these foundational passages, five truths about sin, sickness, and healing emerge.

David went to the root of his problem: "I was born a sinner" (Psalm 51:5). We disobey God because we have a nature addicted to sinfulness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures



Interpretation: Five Foundational Truths

In the interpretation phase, we draw out the meaning of the Scripture we observed, looking carefully at the context of the passages.

Primarily, there are two types of sin—*original sin* and *personal sin*. This statement is based on comparing Psalm 51:5—“I was born a sinner”—with 51:7—“Purify me from my sins.” We are sinners by nature who commit sins through our actions. Look up *original sin* and *personal sins* in your Bible study resources and explain what these terms mean. For an online resource, consult *The Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com.

Think of it this way, original sin is the root; personal sins represent the fruit that comes from a sinful nature. We are sinners by nature from birth and become sinners by choice as we carry out acts of personal sinfulness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Original sin introduced sickness, suffering, and death to the human race. Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 elaborate this point. How did Paul connect the first sin of Adam to sickness, suffering, and death in the world? Read Romans 5:13–19 for his complete thoughts.

Had Adam and Eve never eaten the forbidden fruit, there would never have been death in the human race. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

Often, there exists a direct relationship between personal sins and physical sickness. David's experience in *Psalms 32:3–5* illustrates this point, as does Paul's warning in *1 Corinthians 11:29–30*. How might personal sins lead to physical sickness?

Sometimes there is no relationship between personal sins and human afflictions. Jesus corrected the disciples, saying, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins" (*John 9:3*). What can you conclude about making assumptions regarding the cause of a person's suffering?

Jesus healed the man born blind, but He did not heal many others.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Sometimes it is not God's will that we be healed. Paul's experience in *2 Corinthians 12:7–9* and also *2 Timothy 4:20* confirms what point about God's will and healing?



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

Our prayer for those going through sickness must acknowledge His will. “Lord, if it is Your will and if it is according to Your plan, bring healing to my loved one.” We pray, and then we leave the results with God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: By His Wounds We Are Healed

The fifth statement above—that sometimes God does not want to heal—is the most controversial. Some Bible teachers teach that healing is always God’s will, and they point to *Isaiah 53:5* and *1 Peter 2:21–24* as proof. They say that Jesus’ suffering on the cross promises physical healing for all who believe. Read these passages and explain your interpretation of the phrase, “by his wounds you are healed,” in the space below. To what kind of healing was each author referring?

Christ’s death promises deliverance from sin’s curse and ultimate healing when we step from this life into glory where death and disease will be no more. Paul’s example of not getting healed and similar examples of others in the New Testament demonstrate that healing is not always God’s will. He is sovereign over our lives and has the right to heal us now or heal us later.

It was not God’s will to heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh. Why not? The mystery rests with God. Leave it with Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

Application: The Ministry of Comfort

As we conclude our study, let's listen to Paul's counsel to those who bear the marks of suffering. From his experience of suffering, Paul offered the following guidelines.

Comfort others with the comfort you receive from God. Paul's pain opened doors of ministry to others in pain. "When they are troubled," Paul wrote, "we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Allow your troubles to remind you to rely on God, not yourself. Paul's suffering taught him to stop trusting in himself and "to rely only on God" (1:9).

Give thanks to God for answered prayer. Paul focused on answered prayer and the grace of God. "Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety" (1:11).

The common thread is God—His comfort, His trustworthiness, His grace. How can you draw your thoughts to God during your troubles today? If you don't know how to begin, try finding something for which to give Him thanks.

Paul also leveraged his suffering to help him *draw near* to others in their pain and to *draw upon* others for prayer. We tend to hide from people when we suffer. What can you do today to move from isolation to deeper relationships?



When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

God can heal the sick, and He does heal . . . but not everyone. Why does He heal some and not others? The full answer resides in the mind of God, which is beyond our comprehension. So, we view the subject of healing through the lens of faith, resting our hope on His sovereign plan. Thankfully, Scripture doesn't leave us wondering what to do when we're sick. James offers specific steps in James 5:13–16, which we'll discover in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You my Shepherd that, although I walk through dark valleys, I do not need to be afraid. “You are close beside me,” assured the psalmist, and I cling to that promise (Psalm 23:4). You also promise a feast of blessings and a cup that overflows awaiting me in Your house someday. I long for that day. In Jesus’ name, amen.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY THREE

When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

God reserves the right to heal or not heal as He sees fit. Being the sovereign God of our lives, He has all the voting rights on our health.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT do we do when we're sick? Some say that sick people should trust in God's power alone to heal them rather than medicine.

The Scriptures, however, never draw a line between praying for healing and seeking help from a physician. In fact, James' prescription for sick people includes both prayer and medical care. Let's take a closer look at his instructions for the suffering and the sick in James 5:13–16.

**PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Doctors prescribe medications and perform surgeries, but, ultimately, all healing comes from the One who formed our bodies. Take a few moments in prayer to offer yourself to God and receive grace to understand what His Word says about healing.

Father, I humble myself before You as the maker and healer of my body and soul. Grant me wisdom as I learn Your ways and follow Your prescription for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



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When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

James wrote his epistle to persecuted Christians whose suffering severely tested their faith. In the opening chapter, He counseled his readers to endure their trials with joy, seeing them as avenues to maturity and faith. In his final chapter, James urged “patience in suffering” and offered Job as a model (James 5:10–11). He concluded with practical steps to follow when we’re suffering—prayer being his central theme.



Observation: The Suffering, the Cheerful, and the Sick

Observation is the first phase of *Searching the Scriptures*. As you read the verses, look for patterns, questions and answers, steps to follow, commands, and promises.

What instructions do you observe in *James 5:13*?

What do suffering hardships and enjoying happiness have in common?



When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

What steps do you observe in *James 5:14*?

What teaching about the body and soul, sickness and sin, and prayer and confession do you observe in *5:15–16*?

Can God heal? Yes, of course. With Him, nothing is impossible. He can heal, and He often does. A physician can diagnose and prescribe medicine, but the healing is in God's hands.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Key Words

An accurate interpretation of Scripture often hinges on definitions of key words, such as “suffering” and “sick” in *James 5:13–14*. Commentaries, such as *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*, Bible dictionaries, and lexicons help us discover the meaning of the Greek words.



When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

An excellent online resource is netbible.org. Go to James 5 on this website and click the “Greek” tab. The NET Bible translation of James 5 will appear on the left pane and the Greek New Testament on the right. Hover your cursor over the words *suffering* and *ill* (James 5:13–14 NET). The corresponding Greek word will be highlighted in yellow, and a box containing the definition of the Greek word will also appear. Using this resource or one of your other study aids, write down the definitions of the Greek words in the chart below.

English Word	Greek Root Word	Definition
<i>suffering</i> (5:13)	<i>kakopatheo</i>	
<i>ill</i> (5:14)	<i>astheneo</i>	

These terms describe two conditions that call for specific actions involving prayer. James didn’t say explicitly, but what did James imply the suffering person should pray for?

Pray for encouragement, for recovery from doubt and anxiety, for help to overcome depression. There’s therapy in releasing anxiety through prayer. If you are troubled, the answer is to pray. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What should those who are too sick to leave their bed do? Ill people should summon the elders to come and to pray, “anointing [them] with oil in the name of the Lord” (5:14).



When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll sheds light on the meaning of “anointing.”

We find two distinct uses of anointing with oil in the Bible. One involves a religious or ceremonial act as a symbol for consecration—as in the anointing of David as king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). A more mundane type of anointing was for medicinal or hygienic purposes. . . .

Most likely James has the second use of oil in mind. The idea behind the use of both prayer and anointing was that the church should seek to come to the aid of both the physical and spiritual needs of a sick person. The medicinal use of oil provided physical comfort and promoted the healing process. Please observe that for James there was *no* conflict between prayer and medicine.¹

In James’ day, anointing with medicinal oil was one means of medical care. The Good Samaritan, for example, rubbed oil in the wounds of the victim on the side of the road (Luke 10:34). So, the implication for our day is that not only should the elders come to pray, but also the sick person should accept medical treatment. Prayer and medical care go hand in hand.

The elders are to pray and anoint the person “*in the name of the Lord*” (James 5:14, emphasis added). What does it mean to pray “in the name of the Lord”? Why is it important to always pray in the Lord’s name?



When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

In matters of healing, God alone has the say regarding our restoration—“the Lord will make you well” (James 5:15) and “raise [you] up” (5:15 NASB). Sometimes, James was saying, the Lord answers our prayers for healing and raises up the sick person through a divine act. In Greek, the word for *heal* in 5:15 is *sozo*, which means “save” or “rescue” or “preserve.” What else did James say that God alone has authority to grant in 5:15?

James concluded his instructions in 5:16. Put this verse in your own words and, from the context, summarize the roles of prayer and confession in healing body and soul.

No elder has a magical gift to heal. The elder comes to pray over the sick person in the name of the Lord. That’s not a cliché. It means appealing to God’s will. “We trust You, Lord, and we want Your will to be done.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Praying in Jesus’ Name for God’s Will

Praying in Jesus’ name means to pray to the Father in Jesus’ authority as His representative (John 15:16; 16:23–24). “In Jesus’ name” isn’t a formula we attach to prayer to get whatever we wish but an invitation to ask the Father for what *Jesus* would ask, always in accordance with the Father’s will.



When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

Read *1 John 5:14–15* in the Amplified Bible. What instructions did John give about prayer that further explain Jesus' teaching?

A prayer for healing offered in the name of Jesus always appeals to the will of God. He's the sovereign One who determines whether or not a sick person will be healed.

Application: Four Practical Principles

Our part is to follow the biblical steps when we fall ill. Let's review them in principle form.

- *Confession of sin is healthy—employ it.* Don't let sins build up in your life to the point that they make you physically ill.
- *Praying for one another is essential—practice it.* If you become ill, call upon the elders of your church to come and pray for you. Pray for healing and ask others to pray.
- *Use of medical assistance is imperative—utilize it.* Asking for prayer but ignoring proper medical treatment is not James' point.
- *When healing comes from God—claim it.* Whether or not the illness is the result of personal sin, when God heals, remember to thank Him and give Him the glory!



When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

Write down how you can apply these principles. Do you need to ask for prayer? To pray for another person? To seek medical advice? To confess sin? Take a moment right now to pray!

From the beginning of James 5:13–16 to the end, prayer is the focus. Prayer connects a believer's heart with the sovereign will of God—trusting the One who may or may not choose to heal. If we have joy and health, we should sing praises to God. If we suffer with mental, emotional, or physical pain, then we must pray for healing, confess our sins, and receive God's forgiveness. Most importantly, we must entrust ourselves to God's perfect plan.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your marvelous power to heal us physically and restore us spiritually. I seek Your will for my situation. Bind up my broken heart. Strengthen my failing body. Renew my suffering spirit according to Your wise and merciful plan. In the name of Jesus and according to Your will, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 124.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY FOUR

When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

God has His way in life's storms and shocking moments. We may be stunned in disbelief, but God is not surprised or at a loss to know what to do. His plan is unfolding perfectly.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever faced a trial that was so surprising, unprecedented, and intense that it took your breath away? You never saw it coming, and you had no idea how God would get you through it—but He did.

Such severe hardships are rare, thankfully. But they are among life's most valuable experiences because they reveal God's saving power in ways we otherwise would not have seen.

One such unexpected test rattled Abraham's world, and *it came from God's own hand!* After decades of trusting God for an heir, Abraham finally realized his dream when Isaac was born. But then, God issued a shocking command to Abraham: "Go and sacrifice [Isaac] as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you" (Genesis 22:2).

God's command set the scene for an epochal, mountaintop event that takes our breath away to this day. Abraham's obedience and God's saving grace inspire us to cling to hope in our most hopeless moments when our faith is put to the ultimate test.



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When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. You may wish to pray as Pastor Chuck 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.’”

Write your prayer here if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Genesis 22:1–14* slowly. Print the passage from the online Bible and underline what details or statements seem important. Or, use your cursor to highlight the stand-out phrases on the screen. Note below any questions you may have.



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22



Observation: God's Command, Abraham's Response, God's Provision

Now that you've overviewed the passage, take a closer look at the characters in action.

God's Command—Genesis 22:1–2

Notice how the author revealed God's perspective at the beginning of this story in [Genesis 22:1](#). As you read, remember that you know more reviewing the story than the characters understood in real time. Why do you think the author told us God's intention to test Abraham?

How is Isaac described in [22:2](#)? What did the author emphasize?

God tested Abraham's faith. It wasn't a test between the love of a father and a son. It was a test of faith between a man and his God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

Abraham's Response—Genesis 22:3–10

According to [Genesis 22:3](#), how did Abraham respond to God's call? What details indicate Abraham obeyed immediately?

The following six verses illustrate the depth of Abraham's faith that could only be described as *total abandonment* to God. What does the dialogue in [22:4–8](#) tell us about Abraham's confidence that God would intervene in some way (see especially [22:5, 8](#))?

Abraham's obedience was immediate, thorough, and complete as he prepared for the sacrifice. Isaac, however, couldn't hold his tongue any longer; he asked his father, "Where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" ([22:7](#)). Remember, Isaac didn't know what Abraham knew until Abraham placed him on the altar ([22:8–10](#)). In [22:9](#), it appears that Isaac let Abraham bind him with no resistance. What does Isaac's obedience reveal about his relationship with his father?



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

When “Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice” (Genesis 22:10), even the angels must have held their breath. Just then, God summoned the “the angel of the Lord” (22:11) to intervene in one of Scripture’s most dramatic moments of divine provision.

How could Abraham do it? Faith. He believed that God was great enough to bring his son back to life and that he and Isaac would walk back down the trail to the servants. “We will worship, and we will return,” Abraham believed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Heaven’s Provision—Genesis 22:11–14

How many times did the angel call Abraham’s name in [Genesis 22:11](#)? How many commands did the angel give to Abraham in [22:12](#)? Do you see other repeated words or phrases in [22:13–14](#)?

What was the outcome of God’s test, according to [22:12](#)? Also, notice the writer used the same description of Isaac in both [22:2](#) and [22:12](#)—“your only son.”

Look at what the author told us at the end of [22:13](#) and Abraham’s response in [22:14](#). By comparing these points to Abraham’s statement in [22:8](#), we cross the bridge from observation to interpretation.



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22



Interpretation: What Does This Account Mean?

Let's begin by looking up *burnt offering* (Genesis 22:2) in a Bible dictionary. If you're using the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, you'll find a helpful overview by looking under the entry for *sacrifice* and *sacrifice, human*. We also recommend exploring *Constable's Notes* on this passage at netbible.org. How does a better understanding of *burnt offering* illuminate the meaning of God's command to Abraham to let go?

Now let's look up the term *Moriah* (22:2). Did any other significant biblical events happen at Moriah (see *2 Chronicles 3:1*)? Next, look up *Yahweh Yireh* (or *Jehovah Jireh*). Some dictionaries place these terms under the heading, "Names of God." *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* contains the entry for *Jehovah Jireh* under *Lord Will Provide*. Note anything significant you find.

As we interpret the Bible, we look for what is important both historically and theologically. We understand the eternal nature of God in His actions with timebound people through biblical history. We see Abraham's obedience in his response to God's command. What attribute of God does Abraham's dialogue communicate in *Genesis 22:5 and 22:8*?



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

In Genesis 22:12, the angel told Abraham, “For now I know that you truly fear God.” In your own words, summarize what it means to fear God as illustrated by Abraham.

The word fear is not a word for fright. It’s a word of respect. God meant more to Abraham than anything on the planet. Abraham passed the test with flying colors.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Let’s Compare the Scriptures

Did you know the New Testament references this event? It’s found in *Hebrews 11:17–19*. Take a moment to read this passage and make a few notes on how it contributes to our understanding of Genesis 22:1–14.

Abraham released his precious son into the hands of God knowing that somehow God would provide for both of them. That’s faith! How about you? Are you as confident as Abraham that God will provide for you?



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

Application: What Should I Let Go Of?

Every parent who has choked back tears on a child's first day of school understands releasing. Every retiree who tapes the last box, removes the last picture, and says the last goodbye understands releasing. Any who have felt money slip through their fingers, any who have waved at a disappearing moving van, any who have taken a heart-wrenching walk past a coffin understand releasing too.

Maybe you identify with some of these situations. In the space provided, describe a time when you had to release something or someone you dearly loved. Or perhaps you're still holding on and can't bring yourself to release your "Isaac" into the hands of God. What are the circumstances?

Two principles sum up our passage:

- *God never puts us through a test without a purpose.* Usually, the purpose is designed to make us release what we're clutching.
- *When we trust God, even when we can't understand the reason, He provides solutions that quickly loosen our grip.* The rewards of holding everything loosely will surpass anything we could have ever imagined.

As painful as it is to let go of God's good gifts, the process of releasing opens our hands to receive the greatest reward—the Giver Himself. If you're ready to entrust your "Isaac" to God, use the following space to express your heart to the Lord.



When Unexpected Tests Rattle Our World

Genesis 22

As we internalize this biblical account, let's anchor ourselves in the faithfulness of God who is our provider. Centuries after Abraham released his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, our heavenly Father released His Son, Jesus Christ, on Mount Calvary. Just as Isaac submitted himself to his father, so Jesus surrendered Himself to the altar of the cross. Only no lamb took Jesus' place, for Jesus was the Lamb! His sacrifice atoned for our sins, ushered us into an eternal relationship with our heavenly Father, and became the most epochal of all events history has every recorded.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving this wonderful account of Your servant's faith and Your faithfulness. At this moment, I confess my temptation to cling too tightly to people and things because I believe the lie that life is better when I'm in control. Please increase my faith in You so I may let go of what needs to be released. Most of all, I thank You, Yahweh Yireh, for providing Your Son Jesus Christ as my sacrificial substitute so I may have You as my portion forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY FIVE

When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

Job never saw calamity coming, but he was ready for it. He had spent his entire life preparing.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF you could choose your life's course, which one would you choose—the rocky course or the smooth?

The answer is obvious. We'd select the smooth path—the flower-lined lane filled with an assortment of sights, smells, and pleasurable diversions. No jagged rocks or steep hills to climb. Only soft grass to soothe the feet and soft winds to cool the brow.

The problem-free life sounds inviting, doesn't it? No worries about money. No hassles with the kids. No headaches at work. No stress, no friction, no pain.

Unfortunately, only in over-the-rainbow dreams does such a life exist. Down on earth, no matter how hard we work to attain a life of ease, an avalanche of losses may wipe us out at any moment. How do we spiritually prepare for disasters that we don't see coming? To what hope do we cling when calamity crashes in? The ancient patriarch Job has a few answers, and we turn to his account of suffering in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Most people know about Job and his troubles. Our goal is to know his heart, which saw him through it all to the end. As you open the book of Job, ask the Lord to reveal the inner life of Job that made him “a man of great endurance” (James 5:11), so your spirit can be ready for the trials that come your way.

Father, prepare me to be the kind of person who is prepared to endure suffering. Spark in me a flame of faith that no wave of adversity can extinguish. Help me find in Job’s example a vision of who I can be in Christ. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For a helpful overview of the book of Job, review the [introduction](#) at [insight.org](#), including the [chart](#) of the book of Job. Notice how the first two chapters of the book set the stage for a series of long dialogues between Job and his friends who tried but failed to give Job wise counsel.

At the end of the account, God stepped in to reveal the wisdom Job needed most—God alone rules all things, and He invites us to trust Him as our sovereign King. With this preview in mind, let’s start at the beginning where we meet a truly remarkable man from the land of Uz.



Observation: Waves of Calamity

A technique in *Searching the Scriptures* is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene. Put yourself in the action as you read the account to answer the questions below.

The Character of Job—Job 1:1–5

Suppose you were Job’s neighbor and good friend. What qualities in him would you have admired? Read [Job 1:1–3](#) and write down what you observe.



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

How does *Job 1:4–5* describe Job’s devotion to his family and his Lord? What do his actions reveal about his heart?

Job was merely a man, not a superman. He was blameless, not sinless. But he feared God, walked in humility, and was a man of moral and ethical purity. His peers considered him “the greatest among us.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The First Wave of Calamity and Job’s Response—Job 1:6–22

In *Job 1:6–12*, the author pulls back the curtain of heaven to reveal a most unusual scene. What do you observe about this dialogue between God and Satan, which unsuspecting Job knew nothing about?

What series of back-to-back disasters did Satan unleash in *1:13–19*?



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

If you had been standing with Job hearing the news of one tragedy after another, how would you have responded? How did Job respond, according to *Job 1:20–22*?

Satan lives to see us fall. He exists to hear us curse and blame God because things don't go the way we thought they should have gone. Job neither cursed nor blamed God. So, Satan returned for round two. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Second Wave of Calamity and Job's Response—Job 2:1–10

In *Job 2:1–6*, the author pulls back the curtain of heaven once again, revealing a second conversation between God and Satan. What is similar and different about this dialogue in comparison to the first?

What horrible affliction did Satan give Job, according to *2:7–8*?



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

Job wasn't the only one who suffered terrible loss. The ten fresh graves of her children called out to Job's wife as well. Now, at the sight of her pitiful husband writhing in agony, her heart shattered. Describe her anguish and how she expressed her feelings to Job in [Job 2:9](#).

How did Job respond, according to [2:10](#)?

Always guard your words when a mate or close friend is going through hard times. What you say means more than you realize, and even if you forget your words, he or she won't. So guard your words. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: God's Sovereignty and Our Tragedies

How do we interpret Job's wise responses to tragedy? First, he didn't try to mask his emotions. He "tore his robe in grief," "shaved his head," and "fell to the ground" (Job 1:20). If Job could speak to you in your pain, what counsel about grief do you think he would share?



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

Second, while Job let his emotions flow, he anchored his thoughts in truth. Long before tragedy struck, Job walked in faith and devoted himself to God. Consequently, when Job fell to the ground in grief, he also fell in worship to the King he had been faithfully serving. What truth or truths about God did Job express in his statement in *Job 1:21*, which he then repeated in *2:10*?

Job's personal and profound view of God allowed for suffering, even for the righteous. Later, Job's friends would assert that Job's troubles were the bitter fruit of some sin in Job's life. According to their fairness formula, God always rewards the righteous and curses sinners. How might you use Job's example to explain that God is fair and good even when life doesn't follow the formulas?

Be certain to balance what people tell you with what the Scriptures teach. God's Word is always our guide. It's the foundation of what we believe. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

Correlation: God Does as He Pleases

The correlation phase consults similar biblical passages to complement what's taught in our main passage. Years after the life of Job, King Nebuchadnezzar also experienced severe adversity. Unlike Job, however, Nebuchadnezzar was a boastful, arrogant man who did not honor God. As a result, God humbled him through a season of mental illness. When his sanity returned, the king of Babylon came to his senses and proclaimed God to be the true King:

*“His rule is everlasting,
and his kingdom is eternal.
All the people of the earth
are nothing compared to him.
He does as he pleases
among the angels of heaven
and among the people of the earth.
No one can stop him or say to him,
‘What do you mean by doing these things?’” (Daniel 4:34–35)*

As you compare Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation to Job's in [Job 1:21](#), what similar truths do you find? What phrases most clearly express the sovereignty of God to which you might want to anchor yourself during your times of suffering?

When calamity crashes over us, our natural response is to search for a cause. We blame Satan for meddling behind the scenes. We complain that the world is unfair, and the system is rigged against us. We may point the blame at ourselves, thinking that our trouble is punishment for sin. We may even shoot a glaring look at God, accusing Him of being cruel or absent.

If you're suffering, Job invites you to do as he did—simply grieve. Bring your tears to God, along with your questions, fears, and frustrations, and keep your faith in God even though you don't have all the answers.



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

Application: Concluding Principles

Satan may have set out to destroy Job, but that was not God's intent. God permitted Job's trials to display Job's faith, the quality that God knew Job had. Through his years of devotion to God, Job had been preparing his heart, so that when suffering came, Job's character shined through. The trials proved the genuineness of Job's faith. The same is true for us through our suffering, and someday, a bountiful reward will come.

Peter confidently pointed to the light at the end of our dark tunnel:

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:6–7)

Job's life teaches us three points of wisdom:

- *Trials are inevitable.* Expecting a problem-free life leads to disappointment.
- *Our world is fallen.* Until Christ returns, we inhabit a war zone. Good people suffer.
- *God is sovereign.* The wisest posture through life is humble submission to God.

How does believing these truths help you prepare today for whatever suffering may come to your life tomorrow?



When Calamity Crashes In

Selections from Job 1–2

Are you suffering now? How can you follow Job's example of expressing grief, perhaps by sharing your heart with a family member, trusted friend, pastor, or Christian counselor?

What truths about God and what hope can you cling to today?

When you look through your pain, do you see God in the person of Jesus Christ walking with you? Do you see Him weeping with you? Do you see Him suffering for you on the cross? Do you see Him rising from the grave, motioning for you to follow one day? In faith, step back from the precipice of doubt and fall into the arms of your Savior who welcomes you in your pain. There you will find Job, the man who showed sufferers the way.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the promise of life after death, the assurance of joy through sorrow, and the hope that lights this dark world. Draw my eyes to You through the ashes of adversity that cloud my vision, and keep me faithfully trusting You as my sovereign King. In Jesus' name, amen.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY SIX

When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

God gave Joseph a long-range view and delivered him from the narrow tunnel of his past.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

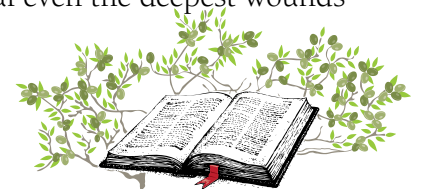
As a teen, Joseph had dreams—vivid, God-given dreams. They foretold that he would be a ruler someday and that his family, including his older brothers, would bow down to him (Genesis 37:5–11). But then, Joseph’s bright future seemed to vanish in a dark cloud of unimaginable abuses that swept over the young man’s life.

Consumed by hatred, Joseph’s jealous older brothers grabbed him to kill him. At the last minute, they decided to sell Joseph to slave traders instead. To cover their sin, they soaked Joseph’s coat in blood and led their father to believe a wild beast had devoured his beloved son (37:18–33).

Carted to Egypt, Joseph was auctioned off as a house servant. He worked hard and rose in favor with his new master, Potiphar. However, without provocation, Potiphar’s wife made sexual advances toward Joseph, and when Joseph refused, she spitefully accused him of attacking her. Potiphar had innocent Joseph thrown into prison (39:1–20).

How impossible Joseph’s dreams must have seemed to him as he sat day after day in his dingy, rat-infested cell . . . *nursing a grudge against those who had done him wrong and bitterly plotting his revenge*. At least, that’s what we’d expect him to do, right?

But, in fact, God gave Joseph grace to endure his abuses and even rise above them. This *Searching the Scriptures* study traces the rest of Joseph’s story, leading up to the redemptive moment when God made Joseph’s impossible dreams possible. It’s a thrilling account of how grace can heal even the deepest wounds and how God can turn offenses against us into something good.



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask the Lord to reveal His care for you through the account of Joseph’s abuse and recovery. In the space below, write a prayer that He will redeem your past, heal your wounds, then help you see His perfect plan for your life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Up to this point, Joseph’s life story was a downward spiral of injustices. Let’s see how God remained with Joseph even when all others abandoned him.



Observation: The Lord Was with Joseph

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step is observation, which involves examining the text as if we’re looking through a magnifying glass. What specific abuses did Joseph suffer?

A Tragic Account of Abuse

Read the verses in the list below and write down what form of abuse Joseph suffered. The first two are filled in as examples.

- 1) Emotional and verbal abuse: “His brothers hated Joseph. . . . They couldn’t say a kind word to him” (Genesis 37:4)
- 2) Murder conspiracy: “Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns” (37:20).
- 3) _____: “His brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern” (37:23–24).



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

- 4) _____: “Joseph’s brothers . . . sold him to [the Ishmaelites] for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt” (37:28).
- 5) _____: “The brothers . . . dipped Joseph’s robe in [goat’s] blood” and “sent the beautiful robe to their father” (37:31–32).
- 6) _____: “The Midianite traders . . . sold Joseph to Potiphar” (37:36).
- 7) _____: “[Potiphar’s wife] kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her. . . . She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, ‘Come on, sleep with me!’” (39:10, 12).
- 8) _____: “‘That Hebrew slave you’ve brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,’ she said” (39:17).
- 9) _____: “[Potiphar] took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king’s prisoners were held, and there he remained” (39:20).

Joseph endured some of the worst forms of evil that humans can inflict on one another. Assault, fraud, confinement, kidnapping, human trafficking, sexual harassment, false accusation, and more. What impacts you most about this list? How would you have responded if you had been Joseph?

What a shock for Joseph to go from favored son to forsaken boy! From a pampered child to an enslaved, unknown, young man. How easy it would have been for him to nurse a grudge and lick his wounds as he rehearsed his abuses, none of which were deserved.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

An Inspiring Example of Character

And yet, as deep into the pit as Joseph descended, he never sunk into despair. What clue does the text give as the source of Joseph's stability during his storms? Read [Genesis 39:2](#) and [39:21](#).

Although people betrayed Joseph, God walked with him each painful step of the way. What character qualities did Joseph's closeness with God display? Draw your answers from Joseph's integrity while in Potiphar's household and while in prison ([39:2–9](#); [21–23](#)).

All the abuse, the wrongs, the false accusations. Joseph was forgotten in prison. Yet, not a word of bitterness came from him. He was saying, "I serve a faithful God who knows everything and has a plan beyond what I could ever imagine." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

A Providential Rescue through Dreams

Joseph’s dreams and their fulfillment played a crucial role in God rescuing Joseph from prison and, ultimately, rescuing Joseph’s family from famine in Canaan. They also testify to Joseph’s *intimate walk with God*, which is both the reason for Joseph’s survival and success in Egypt and the secret to his positive and indomitable attitude.

In the following chart, write down the elements of the dreams and the interpretations.

Verses	Dream Elements	Interpretation
<i>Genesis 37:5–11</i>		
<i>40:5–23</i>		
<i>41:1–36</i>		

“Interpreting dreams is God’s business” (Genesis 40:8), Joseph told his prison mates. What did Joseph say when Pharaoh asked Joseph to interpret his dreams, according to *41:16*?

When he interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph made it clear that he was merely God’s mouthpiece. Pharaoh, who was considered a god by the Egyptians, marveled at Joseph’s connection to the one, true God: “Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?” (41:38).



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

God moved the hand of Pharaoh to rescue Joseph from prison and give Joseph a God-ordained mission. What was this mission, according to *Genesis 41:37–57*?

When famine struck, Joseph's brothers, humbled by hunger, came to Egypt for food. Fulfilling Joseph's prophetic boyhood dreams, his brothers bowed before the one they had abused. Instead of taking revenge, however, Joseph took his family under his care and gloried in the providence of God who had brought good from evil (chapters 42–46).



Interpretation: God Intended It All for Good

In the interpretive phase, we seek to understand the meaning and significance of Joseph's life story. The key to understanding is found in a statement Joseph made to his brothers after they moved to Egypt: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20).

What had just occurred before Joseph made this statement, according to *49:33–50:13*?



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

What were Joseph's brothers afraid of after their father died, according to *Genesis 50:14–18*?

How did Joseph reassure his brothers, according to *50:19–21*?

What was Joseph's view of God that made it possible for him to forgive his brothers?

Joseph told his abusers, in effect, "You weren't in charge of my life; God brought me here, and His plan is right!" At the core of Joseph's faith was an unwavering trust in the grace and goodness of God.

This is the same man who was hated by his siblings. Same man who was abandoned and sold. Same man who was falsely accused of rape, thrown in prison, and left to die. He was the same man who had the chance to get even but said, "Am I God, that I can punish you?" . . . Grace was the one concept the brothers could not fathom.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21



Correlation: God Offers Grace

What do the following verses say about the healing power of God's amazing grace toward those who sin and those who suffer?

2 Corinthians 12:9

1 Peter 5:5–7

*Joseph offered to his brothers the same grace God gave him, and they struggled to receive it.
How long will it take you to reach out and accept God's grace? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

Application: Grace for the Abused and the Abusers

We began our study focusing on Joseph as a model for sufferers. If you, like Joseph, have felt the sting of other people's sins, what about Joseph's walk with God encourages you today?

What principle about God's redemptive plan for our lives can you apply from Joseph's words to his abusers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20)?

On the other hand, you may identify with Joseph's brothers—as one who struggles to receive God's gracious forgiveness. How does Joseph's attitude of restoration toward his brothers reveal God's heart toward you?



When God Gives Grace to Endure

Genesis 45:1–8; 50:18–21

Joseph's sojourn from the pit of prison to the pinnacle of the palace was nothing short of incredible. Joseph ended his days in right standing with God and free from the bitterness of his past. He faced death with no resentment toward those who harmed him. How can we experience this kind of peace? By daily embracing God's grace, no matter what our circumstances may be.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, God of grace and glory, master of my life, and planner of all that is good and best, hear my prayer of trust as I bring to You my pain and heartache. Relieve me of the guilt of my sin and heal me from the hurt caused by the sin of others. I release my resentment and bitterness to You, my Savior who loves me and walks with me through every trial I face. Amen.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY SEVEN

When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

Every one of us has giants in our lives. Unless I miss my guess, you're afraid of yours. Stay realistic rather than running scared. Remember, greater is He who is in you than whoever may be in this world.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE likes to see an underdog take on a champion. The most thrilling of all underdog contests was when the scrappy shepherd boy David faced mighty Goliath. Have you ever been in a lopsided battle like that, overmatched against a menacing opponent or overwhelmed by some seemingly impossible problem?

This *Searching the Scriptures* study examines the familiar biblical account of David and Goliath from perhaps a new perspective: *David's victory was not the result of a miracle.* Indeed, the battle belonged to the Lord, but David still had to utilize his talent as a master slinger. No one could overpower Goliath hand-to-hand; however, Goliath had hidden weaknesses that made him vulnerable against David's God-enabled skills.

Your giant may not wear armor and loom nine feet tall, but it's just as intimidating. Stand your ground. God has equipped you with the skills you need to meet your foe. All you need is David-like faith in God and a willingness to face your problem head-on.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

S07
1

When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What are the giants that lumber and bellow in your life right now?

Take a moment to commit these problems to the Lord. In the space below, write a prayer inviting His Spirit to strengthen your faith and ask Him to help you see them through His eyes with the help of His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read *1 Samuel 17:1–3*. These verses describe the Philistines' invasion against the Israelites via the Valley of Elah, a strategic gateway into Israel. You can locate the Valley of Elah in your atlas or Bible maps. Or, at insight.org, you can view the “*Kingdoms of Israel*” map, which shows Philistia and the city of Gath, Goliath's home. To view a satellite image of the Valley of Elah, a diagram of the possible site of the battle between David and Goliath, and photographs of the valley, see “*The Valley of Elah*” at biblewalks.com.



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

As you can see from these maps and photos, the Philistines' invasion was like the thrust of a spear into the heart of Israel. What was at stake if Saul's army could not defeat the Philistines and send Goliath back to Gath?



Observation: The Combatants

Now that we've set the scene, let's observe the characters and action.

Goliath's Challenge

As the two armies faced each other on opposite hills, the imposing Goliath strode to the valley floor with his challenge. Read *1 Samuel 17:4–10* and write down what, from an external point of view, made Goliath a terrifying foe?



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

Goliath's taunt took aim directly at Saul, who was Israel's obvious choice to fight the giant. How is Saul described in *1 Samuel 9:1–2*? And what was the reason he was made king, according to *8:19–20*?

The Philistines' strategy was not just to divide Israel but to demoralize the nation by humiliating Israel's king. What did Saul do in response to Goliath's challenge? Let's see.

Saul's Fear and David's Determination

Read *1 Samuel 17:11* and *25*, and write down how Saul responded.

While Saul's knees knocked in fear, David's heart pounded with courageous determination. When David heard the giant "shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel" (*17:23*), what did David ask the soldiers (*17:26*)? How did his brother, Eliab, react to David's questioning, and how did Saul react (*17:28–31*)?



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

David measured Goliath against the true object of the Philistine’s taunts—the Lord. What was Goliath’s might against the Almighty? How could this blasphemer shake his fist in God’s face and win? Observe closely David’s conversation with Saul in *1 Samuel 17:32–40*. Use the following chart to contrast David’s godly perspective with Saul’s human-oriented perspective.

David’s Godly Perspective <i>1 Samuel 17:32–40</i>	Saul’s Human-Oriented Perspective <i>1 Samuel 17:32–40</i>

Saul couldn’t fathom how a teenage boy could overpower the heavyweight champion. But that was Saul’s problem all along. He couldn’t view himself or his problems from the perspective of an all-powerful, faithful God . . . and he didn’t appreciate the deadliness of David’s skill.

Slingers were like snipers. They traveled light. They wore no armor. They carried no weapons except a little pouch of leather with a long leather strand. They could hit their target up to 200 yards. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Contest

In the interpretive phase, we seek to understand the meaning of David’s victory. Take a few minutes to read the account in *1 Samuel 17:40–51*. What do you think were the reasons David was able to defeat Goliath?



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

David acknowledged the Lord as the true victor (*1 Samuel 17:46–47*). And yet, the Lord won the victory not by thundering from heaven, as He had done in a previous battle with the Philistines (*7:10*). Instead, God prevailed *through David* and his stone-slinging skills.

David had honed his skill through countless lonely hours of practice in the wilderness, and it had been battle-tested against lions and bears (*17:34–37*). Little did David know all this was in preparation for the day he would fling a stone with the accuracy and velocity of a bullet to Goliath's forehead.

What principle can you draw from God working through David's skill to win the battle against Goliath?

How did David do it? He remembered how God had strengthened him in days past. Don't forget those stories. Every one of us can name them. Remember the things God did for you in the past. It will strengthen your faith for today. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God Looks at the Heart

Size and power may impress us, but God is more interested in a person's character and devotion to Him. Read the account of a previous episode when Samuel anointed David (*1 Samuel 16:6–13*). What do you learn about seeing people through God's eyes? How can this perspective help you when facing giants?

Don't go by size. There's an important lesson here for all of us who face our own giants. The powerful and fearful in appearance are not always what they seem. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

Application: Lessons for Battling Giants

Pastor Chuck Swindoll lists four types of giant-sized challenges that can paralyze us if we let them.

- 1) **Domestic:** Marital discord is one type of domestic giant, along with the death of a loved one or a wandering son or daughter. These giants pound us with grief, confusion, and heartache.
- 2) **Personal:** This type of giant may involve a serious health issue, worry about aging, a distressing lawsuit, or a move to a strange new place. These giants hurl spears of loneliness, depression, negativity, and bitterness.
- 3) **Economic:** The name of this bellowing bully may be unemployment, financial collapse, or out-of-control spending. These giants inflict fear and insecurity.
- 4) **Spiritual:** The most dangerous giant of all is unbelief. We must overcome this giant with the aid of the Spirit who helps us trust our Savior. This giant mocks us with doubt and despair.

Under which category can you place your giants? What feelings have you experienced?

What can you do? Sit on the sideline and wish for a miracle? No, based on our study, first, *remember what God has done for you in the past*. Second, *develop a God-centered perspective*. While Saul retreated from the fight, David took the fight to the enemy and, in that way, had the thrill of experiencing the strength of the Almighty through him.



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17

David had to take action to defeat his Goliath. What David-like skills has the Lord given you to use as you face your giant?

Which principle from David's example gives you the most hope?

Don't overestimate the might of taunting giants, and don't underestimate the power of God! Many of the giants we face are nothing but empty shells, having no substance at all. Deep within David's life, there was the assurance that God was on his side. Nothing's more potent than God-given hope when facing giants.



When the Giants of Life Attack

1 Samuel 17



A FINAL PRAYER

Close this study by praying the prayer of Patrick of Ireland, and express your dependence on the power of God today.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward;
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.¹

ENDNOTE

1. Patrick of Ireland, as quoted in *The One Year Book of Personal Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991), 4.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY EIGHT

When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

God is a master teacher. He teaches us patience by making us wait for what we want. He teaches us wisdom by allowing us to fail. He teaches us grace through hardship. He teaches us humility by sending thorns that rip away our pride.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MEASURED by any standard, Paul was an impressive individual. Intellectually, he was top of his class, trained in the finest Jerusalem academy under the eminent Jewish scholar, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was a brilliant theologian and gifted writer—thirteen of the epistles in the New Testament bear his autograph. In his pre-conversion days, none could match Paul's drive to observe every detail of the Jewish law. Paul wrote about his religious intensity,

I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. (Philippians 3:6)

Headstrong, self-assured, and uncompromising, Paul powered through any task set before him. And yet, while his intellect, giftedness, and zeal set him on a high pedestal, those same attributes made him easy prey for pride.

In the blinding light of Christ's appearance on the road to Damascus, Paul came face-to-face with his sinful condition. He repented on his knees and committed himself to Jesus for the rest of his life. His conversion, however, marked just the first step in his transformation. To deal with Paul's pride, God signed him up for what we might call "thorn" therapy—the Holy Spirit's painful but merciful method of shaping us into the image of Christ.



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S08
1

When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We need the Spirit's light to reveal our pride and guide us in Christ's way of humility. Let the following prayer prepare you to receive God's illuminating truth.

Father, through Your Word, shine the light of truth into my soul, revealing the pride that may be holding me back from fully depending on You. Search me. Test me. Transform me into the likeness of Your Son. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *2 Corinthians 12:1–10*, Paul revealed some of the most personal details about his life. Read this passage once to get the flow of his thoughts, and then read it again with the following four-point outline in mind:

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



Observation: Privileges, Humility, Pain, and Power

Observation is the necessary beginning point in *Searching the Scriptures* as we look for contrasts and comparisons, figures of speech, and repetition of key words. Write down what you see in the passage as you answer the following questions.



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

What did Paul say in *2 Corinthians 12:1–4* regarding the *unsurpassed privilege* God gave him? What tone do you sense in the way he shares something so personal? (We'll examine the meaning of Paul's experience later; for now, simply record what you see.)

How did Paul express *uncommon humility* in *12:5–6*? Why did he avoid boasting about his spiritual experience?

Why did Paul even bring up the issue of boasting? Behind the scenes, Paul's opponents in Corinth were slinging mud at him, forcing him to defend his apostleship. Backed in the corner, he had to talk about himself—but he did so reluctantly. “Pre-conversion” Paul would have ballyhooed his accomplishments. But the Spirit-transformed Paul always put Christ and the gospel center stage and never sought the spotlight.

What caused the change? How was God using the tool of *inescapable pain* to mold Paul's character, according to *12:7*? Don't miss the repeated phrase. Why do you think Paul repeated this phrase?



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

Finally, in 2 Corinthians 12:8–10, what *paradoxical power* emerged as the thorn therapy did its work in Paul?



Interpretation: Paradise and Pain

In the interpretation phase, feel free to use your Bible study resources. One resource is Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, which is available at insight.org. For an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

“The Revelations from God”—2 Corinthians 12:7

What was the nature of Paul's “wonderful revelations from God” (2 Corinthians 12:7)? What is “the third heaven” (12:2)? What did Paul say he experienced there? What questions remain unanswered about his experience?

Paul was converted to Christianity around AD 35 and then spent about three years in solitude in Arabia (*Galatians 1:15–18*). He eventually returned to his hometown in Tarsus and stayed there until Barnabas found him and brought him to Antioch (*Acts 9:23–30; 11:25–26*). One year later, Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey.

At the time of writing 2 Corinthians, the apostle was on his *third* missionary journey, having planted churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece—including Corinth. He corresponded with the Corinthian church between AD 53–55. Only now, after years of keeping quiet, Paul finally shared his experience.



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

Why do you think Paul may have kept these revelations a secret for so long?

Paul despised the thought of being on a pedestal where people would look up to him to the point of worshiping him. He was a mere man with his own problems.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

“A Thorn in My Flesh”—2 Corinthians 12:7

How does Pastor Chuck Swindoll explain what Paul refers to as “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan” in his commentary, *Insights on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (page 469)? Consult other sources that you may have. What does your research reveal?

What would it have been like for Paul to live in constant, stabbing pain?



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

The thorn assaulted Paul like an implacable demon repeatedly attacking the man. Paul was never free of pain, and the reason was to keep him from proudly exalting himself, to keep him from being conceited, strutting around like a celebrity. Thorns humble us.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Timeless Principles

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

Now you try. In the chart below are some statements from the passage. Write down the principles that you glean from 2 Corinthians 12.

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



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

In one sense, Paul's painful affliction disabled him because it kept him from operating in full strength; but, in another sense, it enabled him. It pulled the plug on his pride! It freed Paul to go beyond his human frailty and live fully in Christ's kingdom.

What a paradox! The pain limiting Paul gave him access to Christ's limitless power. Once Paul settled into this truth, he could say, "I was glad to let it happen."

Christ's power works best in weakness. You'll never read about this paradoxical power in a newspaper or on the evening news. It's rare. It's made possible only by grace.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Correlate this passage with an earlier passage in Paul's letter, [2 Corinthians 4:5–10](#). Write down your insights as you compare this passage with what you learned about Christ's power through weakness in 12:1–10.

How should we rightly understand our identity and our role as followers of Christ?

To what *hope* can you cling when "pressed," "perplexed," "hunted," and "knocked down" (4:8–9)?



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

When you suffer, do you focus on the pain or the lessons it teaches? Is God's grace all you need? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Bringing It Home

Application is the final step. Pick one of the principles from the chart above and write it in such a way that is most effective to you. Use “I” statements as you state your desire to put the truth into practice.

What difference can living by this principle make regarding your inner peace? Your relationships? Your work? Your closeness with Christ?

As you wrap up this study, carry these three thoughts with you. First, remember that *God has a plan* for you that might go beyond your limitations. This will give you perspective on God's bigger purpose.

Second, *depend on God's power* in your pain. This will give you confidence as you more keenly sense God at work.



When Thorns Rip Our Pride

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

Third, *focus on the flower not the thorns*. Stop obsessively thinking about your pain. Three times, Paul prayed for God to take away his thorn. When God said no, Paul shifted his mind-set from what he couldn't do to what God could do through him. Let your weakness remind you of God's strength and let your suffering point to the glory that "outweighs them and will last forever" (2 Corinthians 4:17). This will give you hope—which is what we need most when we're going through our own "thorn" therapy.



A FINAL PRAYER

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

Father,



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY NINE

When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

Warnings should be specific and brief. They are meant to linger in our minds as lessons that should never be forgotten.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

So far, we've clung to hope through some severe storms—debilitating sickness, surprising tests, life-altering losses, cruel mistreatment, intimidating giants, and, in our previous study, painful thorns.

Through each gale, we've set our anchor in God who holds us fast—helping us to endure *and* to mature. That's our hope, isn't it? Trials are training ground for wisdom. They are pathways to spiritual highlands known only by those who dare to climb.

Trials aren't random events with no meaning; rather, they are part of God's ultimate plan to restore all things. For this reason, Joseph could say with confidence to his abusive brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20). Paul assured us, "God causes *everything* to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:28, emphasis added).

Let's hang on to this hope in this *Searching the Scriptures* study as we consider how God disciplines His sinning children—which sometimes includes us. His discipline has a purpose: ***not to harm but to produce something good in us and through us in our world.***



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S09
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When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Tune your heart to hear God's message in His Word. Let the following prayer prompt your own supplication.

Father, I invite You to shine Your light into every corner of my life. Reveal any fear that keeps me from fully trusting You, any hidden sin that weakens my love for You, and any rebellious attitude that resists Your grace. I open myself completely to Your loving correction. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Our passage comes from Paul's correspondence with the church in Corinth. In his letters, Paul took on a parental tone with his readers, calling himself, "your father in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 4:15). As any parent, Paul loved his spiritual children, but he was concerned.


While God had richly blessed the church with spiritual gifts and fine Bible teachers, the believers had become proud; and their pride opened a gateway to all sorts of sins—sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, abuse, drunkenness, and swindling one another (5:11). The church was no different than the surrounding decadent culture—a moral mess!

Paul exposed these sins in his letters. His purpose wasn't to shame the wayward believers but to lovingly "warn [them] as my beloved children" (4:14). Paul's warning culminated in a sobering lesson from Israel's idolatry that he didn't "want [them] to forget" (10:1).



When God’s Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

 **Observation: Warning from the Wilderness**

Paul often used literary techniques such as repetition and contrast to build his point, and we can use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills to observe these techniques in *1 Corinthians 10:1–5*.

Read the passage and notice the repeated phrase, “all of them.” Then, find the contrasting phrase, “most of them.” Mark these phrases or highlight them. In the chart below, write down the blessings *all of the Israelites* experienced as Paul listed them. To appreciate the historical background of Paul’s reference, read the Old Testament account in the right-hand column. In the last row, write down what *most of them* experienced despite their many blessings.

Phrase	Blessings the Israelites Experienced	Backstory
<i>All of them</i> (10:1a)		<i>Exodus 13:21–22</i>
<i>All of them</i> (10:1b)		<i>Exodus 14:21–29</i>
<i>All of them</i> (10:2)		<i>Exodus 14:31</i>
<i>All of them</i> (10:3)		<i>Exodus 16:2–31</i>
<i>All of them</i> (10:4)		<i>Exodus 17:1–7</i>
<i>Most of them</i> (10:5)		<i>Numbers 14:20–23</i>

When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

The Lord showered blessings upon His people in the barren wilderness: guidance from the cloud, protection through the sea, sustenance through daily manna, and water from the rock. And yet God was not pleased with most of them. Why?

Read *1 Corinthians 10:6–10*. In the chart below, note Paul's explanation of the Israelites' sin, and then read the backstory in Exodus and Numbers in the right-hand column.

Sin	Israelites' Sin	Backstory
<i>Idolatry (10:6–7)</i>		<i>Exodus 32:1–6</i>
<i>Immorality (10:8)</i>		<i>Numbers 25:1–9</i>
<i>Testing the Lord (10:9)</i>		<i>Numbers 21:4–6</i>
<i>Grumbling (10:10)</i>		<i>Numbers 16:41–50</i>

This is quite a list of sins! No wonder “God was not pleased” (1 Corinthians 10:5).

Everybody was blessed . . . but. The contrast was meant to be jarring. All of them received God's blessings, but most of them failed to please God and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. It's a serious warning. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Theology within the Warning

In the interpretation phase, we use our *Searching the Scriptures* tools to unlock the meaning of the passage. Considering the theological context of the passage helps us better understand what was at stake and the reason for the severity of God's discipline.



When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

God designed the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land to illustrate His plan of redemption for the whole human race. God wanted His people to model faith through their trust and worship. Yet instead of offering God a bouquet of devotion, a weedy infestation of grumbling grew in the people's hearts. Worse still, they shunned God and embraced idols.

How did the Israelites' sin disrupt God's plan? Why was it so vital for God to correct them?

Looking back, we see hints of the gospel in the Israelites' journey. God's deliverance and the Israelites' baptism "as followers of Moses" symbolized our deliverance from sin and baptism into Christ (*Romans 6:3–4; 1 Corinthians 10:1–2*). What did God's provisions of the "spiritual food" of manna and "spiritual water" from the "spiritual rock" symbolize (*1 Corinthians 10:3–5*)? How did these provisions point to Christ? For help with the answers, consult your resources, including *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

What comparisons did Paul make between God's blessings for the Israelites and His spiritual blessings for Christians? What lesson was Paul's warning teaching (*10:6–10*)?



When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

The *magnitude* of God's blessings amplifies the *seriousness* of Paul's warning. Paul wrote, "These things happened as a warning to us, *so that we would not crave evil things as they did*" (1 Corinthians 10:6, emphasis added). What discipline was Paul concerned might happen to the Corinthian believers if they didn't repent and change—a discipline which Paul may have been alluding to in *11:20–30*?

Paul's warning lit a fire in his original readers to confess their sin and change. (Read about their repentance in *2 Corinthians 7:8–11*.) It does the same for us. What is the first step we can take to deal with the sins in our life that displease the Lord? Let's return to the Israelites' example to find the way.



Correlation: God's Provision for Sin

Paul wrote that the Israelites who tested the Lord "died from snakebites" (1 Corinthians 10:9). Read the full account in *Numbers 21:4–9*. Write down how *God provided a way of restoration* for those He disciplined.



When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

According to *John 3:13–17*, in his nighttime visit with Nicodemus, Jesus compared Himself to the bronze snake lifted up in the wilderness. What hope did Jesus offer those who recognize their sin and turn to Him?

Jesus Himself and His sacrificial death for our sins represents the singular hope for all sinners. Cling to that hope today as you apply this study.

God's plan was so full of grace. Though His discipline was severe, all people needed to do was look at the bronze snake and they would be healed. If you've never come to know the Lord Jesus, look to the cross. Turn to Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Dealing with Sin at the Cross and Beyond

Meaningful Bible study always leads to application. If you are sensing God's discipline because of sin in your life, take the important step of confession right now. This simple prayer may express your heart:

Heavenly Father, I have sinned against You like the ancient Israelites sinned in the wilderness. Remove Your hand of discipline from me. I look to the cross now as I did when I first trusted Christ as my Savior. Lead me in Your good way. Thank You for the forgiveness You offer and the new life I can experience through Your Son. In His name, amen.

What fruit of repentance can you show? Have you offended someone who needs your apology? Do you need pastoral direction or Christian counseling to find freedom from habits that may be binding you? What help from the Holy Spirit can you seek? Who can you talk with?



When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

For His sinning children, God offers restored joy and a fresh start—which is the *good* His discipline brings. Close this study with a sense of gratitude for the Father's loving discipline by remembering the benefits and thanking the Lord for each one.

- 1) *God's discipline confirms that you are His child.* “The LORD disciplines those he loves” (Hebrews 12:6).
- 2) *God's discipline deepens your spiritual life.* “Shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?” (12:9).
- 3) *God's discipline is always for our good.* “God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness” (12:10).
- 4) *God's discipline is painful but profitable.* “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way” (12:11).

God cares enough to correct us and set us on His path. That's something for which we can be eternally grateful.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for loving me enough to do whatever You think is necessary to hold me near and warn me of the dangers of sin. The pain of discipline is difficult to bear, but it is not nearly as severe as the consequences of sin. So, do Your will in my life, correct me when necessary, and keep me on Your peaceful path. In Jesus' name, amen.

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY TEN

When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

We like open doors. We like green lights. We like wide open entrances into great opportunities. Detours and dead-end streets are never enjoyable, certainly not at the time. But sometimes they are divine gifts from the One who loves us.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A slammed door makes a harsh sound, doesn't it? It's harsh to the ears and the heart. It rings of rejection, refusal, and exclusion. It's absolute, like the exclamation point on a sign that says, "No Entrance!" or "Keep Out!"

A blocked opportunity can seem like a slammed door. After much prayer and wise counsel, you expectantly set out for a particular goal that you feel certain is God's will. The road is smooth and the timing seems right, then, without warning—*slam*. Your ministry dream never materializes. The relationship you hoped might lead to marriage ends in a breakup. The house you had your heart set on is sold to another family. The contract you worked months to win is awarded to another firm. You may ask yourself, "Why did things not turn out as planned? What did I do wrong?"

Perhaps it's not a matter of doing wrong. Although the closed door feels like a rebuff, it may be an unexpected blessing. Behind that closed door may be a hand of grace.



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Unfulfilled dreams can feel devastating. As you seek God's counsel, invite your Father's tender touch.

Father, You know how much of myself I invested in a dream that turned out to be a dead end. Through the lens of Your Word, open my eyes to Your perspective on closed doors and refocus my hope on You. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul ran into a series of closed doors on his second missionary journey . . . which must have surprised him. He had every reason to expect the second journey to be just as successful as the first. He had taken the gospel to Jews in Cyprus and cities west of his hometown, Tarsus, and, amazingly, God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too” (Acts 14:27). Surely, God would hold this door of faith open on Paul's second trip as well.

The Jerusalem council had given their blessing to him to minister to Gentiles (15:6–29). Paul had joined with a new traveling partner, Silas, and the Antioch church had given their full support, entrusting them “to the Lord's gracious care” (15:40). All these factors flowed together like tributaries, forming a bubbling river of excitement for the journey ahead.



Observation: Closed Doors, Open Doors

Observation is the first step to deeper understanding and, most importantly, application. Use your observation skills to answer the following questions, expanding your answers if you see anything else interesting in the verses.

According to [Acts 15:36](#), what reason did Paul give for taking a second journey? Why did Barnabas decide not to accompany Paul this time, according to [15:37–40](#)?



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10



Searching the Scriptures Bible Maps

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a handy tool in the observation process is a Bible atlas. We recommend *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* by Carl G. Rasmussen, which you can purchase at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org). This resource contains an excellent set of maps of Paul's missionary journeys. You can also find Paul's journeys in the maps section of your Bible or the online map, "*Paul's Missionary Journeys*."

Open Doors in Familiar Territory

Looking on your Bible map of Paul's missionary journeys, trace Paul and Silas' trip from its beginning point through the first leg in *Acts 15:40–41*? What was their initial objective?

As the missionaries pushed west, they visited churches Paul had planted. Whom did Paul select to join him in Lystra, and what attributes made him particularly helpful to Paul's plan to reach Jews and Gentiles, according to *16:1–3*?



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

What Mark lacked as Paul's apprentice on his first journey, Paul found in Timothy. Timothy was familiar with this region, plus, Timothy had staying power. For years, he clung to Paul—his spiritual father and mentor—and, later, became one of the early church's first pastors (*1 Timothy 1:1–2; 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:1–6*).

Paul delighted in Timothy and was pleased with the health of the churches. How did the doors keep opening in *Acts 16:4–5*? All signs pointed up and onward!

Good news! The churches grew larger every day. How exciting for Paul when he returned to see the Lord using his earlier work. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Closed Doors in the New Territory

With a favorable breeze of success at their backs, the band of missionaries traveled westward. On your map, trace the regions recorded in *Acts 16:6–8*. What happened again and again, however, as they tried to gain a foothold for the gospel in these areas?



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

In one region, the Holy Spirit “prevented them from preaching the word” and “did not allow them to go there” in another (Acts 16:6–7). Other Bible versions described the Spirit’s actions with equally strong words—“forbidden” (NASB), “blocked” (MSG), and “the Spirit of Jesus said no” (LB). The Spirit closed each door with a slam until they arrived at Troas, and there they stopped and wondered what to do next.

What do you observe about the location of Troas on your map? What must the missionaries have felt as they arrived at this distant city after so many closed doors along the way?

No explanation. God somehow prevented them from entering these areas of spiritual darkness. It must have been tough for Paul, but we read no argument from him or see him attempting to force his way through. He simply accepted God’s closed doors.
—Pastor Church Swindoll

Open Door across the Sea

What happened in Troas, according to [Acts 16:9–10](#)? What change do you notice in the personal pronoun in 16:10? What does this change in the telling of the narrative imply? Who joined the group? If you’re stumped, check your study Bible to identify the person, who is also the author of Acts.



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

The abilities of the missionaries were never in doubt, nor was their calling. The people of Asia needed Christ just as much as the people in Europe, and yet, God specifically said no to Asia and yes to Europe. Why? The issue was whose hearts were ready to receive the gospel, and only the Holy Spirit knew where the soil was most fertile for planting.

Understanding how God closes doors and opens others is our next subject.



Interpretation: God's Will in Closed Doors

In the interpretation phase, we seek to discover the meaning of the passage, which in this case involves how God communicates His will . . . which is mysterious at times. How exactly did the Holy Spirit prevent, forbid, not allow, block, or say no?

Read about [Acts 16:6–8](#) in your Bible study resources, including commentaries. Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts* is a helpful resource. Online, consult [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#) or [The IVP New Testament Commentary Series](#) at [biblegateway.com](#). Write down what you find.

Whatever means the Spirit used, His closed doors were clearly evident, and the missionaries obeyed God without question. Just as clear was Paul's vision of a man from northern Greece calling out, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (16:9). There was no doubt about the source of this vision or the message.



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

What principle can you conclude about God leading us with closed and open doors based on Paul's experience?

Sometimes God keeps us in a holding pattern for months. We think, "I need a vision!" Since we have the complete Bible, all we need is the Word of God, a bended knee, and a willingness to wait for clear direction. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God Opens and Closes Doors

Where else in Scripture do we find teaching about God opening and closing doors? Read [Revelation 3:7–8](#). What do these verses say about the nature and authority of Jesus, who is the subject?

We usually think of God as a door opener, don't we? But through the Spirit and through Jesus, God closes doors just as often. What confidence does this verse give you in trusting God's hand of guidance?



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

Application: Trusting God to Open and Close Doors

Through the following application principles, Pastor Chuck Swindoll draws our focus to God when doors slam shut.

- 1) *Because God is sovereign, He is in full control of all the doors in our lives.*
- 2) *Being in full control, God takes full responsibility.*
- 3) *When a door of something good according to our plan closes, it often leads us to an open door of something better in God's plan.*
- 4) *Not until we walk through the door that God opens will we realize the necessity of the ones He closed.*

How do you handle closed doors? Do you jiggle the knob? Pound on the door? Try to shoulder it open? What feelings do you experience—disappointment, frustration, rejection, anger, confusion, fear?

How can Paul's example and the principles above help you the next time a door closes?



When Doors Slam Shut

Acts 16:6–10

After a series of closed doors, could God be opening a door you didn't expect? How might you alter your course to enter?

Stopping the journey because of a disappointing no may cause you to miss the joy of a future yes. Keep moving forward like Paul and his companions until you reach the open door . . . and don't be afraid to walk through it, trusting God to lead you in His plan.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for closing doors and helping me move away from what I thought was Your direction to Your true path. Give me a sensitive heart, an open mind, and a willingness to follow You wherever You lead. In Jesus' name, amen.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY ELEVEN

When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17

I want to make the most of times of solitude. I want to come back deeper. I want to be more authentic. I want to know Christ more and the power of His resurrection.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MANY people fear being alone. Separation from loved ones feels like a dry and barren desert.

The Bible is full of examples of individuals whose circumstances drove them to a lonely place—Hagar shunned by Sarai, Elijah on the run from Jezebel, Moses wandering the wasteland of Midian. In each case, God came near them in their wilderness, and revealed Himself to them in a life-changing way. Their divine encounter assured them that they were never truly alone and that God had a special plan for them. With God, their desert of loneliness blossomed into a garden of grace.

When we see solitude as an opportunity for communion with our Father and deeper training in godliness, the fear of being alone fades. We seek out solitude. We intentionally slow our pace, escape the noise, and take time to know God more intimately and to examine ourselves more honestly. Other great men and women of the Bible met God in the wilderness, including Paul—whose season of solitude is the subject of this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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S11
1

When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Solitude creates a quiet space for God to minister to you. Use David’s prayer as you invite God to examine, counsel, correct, and lead you during your quiet time in His Word.

*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

Before his conversion, Paul (then, Saul) was a fanatical Pharisee, “a real Hebrew if there ever was one!” (Philippians 3:5). A strict observer of Jewish law, Paul became a militant defender of Judaism—a religious hit man of sorts, hunting for those he deemed lawbreakers, particularly followers of Jesus.

The early Christians feared Paul. Some believers fled persecution in Jerusalem and moved to Damascus. Paul found out and set out to Damascus to drag them “back to Jerusalem in chains” (Acts 9:2). On the way, however, Jesus stopped Paul in his tracks with a brilliant display of divine glory.

The light of Jesus’ glory blinded Paul instantly, but it also opened Paul’s spiritual eyes to his sin. The truth became clear. By persecuting Christians, Paul was fighting *against* God. But, mercifully, instead of condemning Paul, God gave Paul a special calling. Paul describes the impact of this moment of grace in Galatians 1:11–17.



When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17

Observation: Solitude in Paul's Life

Paul wrote Galatians to defend the gospel against Jewish legalists. In the opening section, Paul shared his conversion story to illustrate Christ's new way of grace. Observe Paul's own words as he explained his background in Judaism and how he came to understand the gospel.

What point about the gospel did Paul assert in *Galatians 1:11*? Why do you think this was an important place to begin his defense against the legalists?

According to *1:12–14*, how did Paul portray the intensity of his zeal for “the traditions of [his] ancestors,” which included the Hebrew Scriptures and all the extra-biblical rabbinical laws?



When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17

Pharisee Paul was the ultimate legalist, which makes his switch to living under grace all the more striking. Only a direct call from God could have unchained Paul's law-bound heart. How did Paul describe God's call in *Galatians 1:15–16*? For background, read *Acts 9:1–16*.

Paul had much to learn about how the Hebrew Scriptures pointed to Christ and Christ's new way. Who did Paul not consult, according to *Galatians 1:16–17*? Instead, where did he go for his training? How did this fact add credibility to Paul's argument?

In today's world, Paul might have immediately hit the celebrity speaking circuit . . . but no. He did just the opposite. He retreated to obscurity for three years (*1:18*). He enrolled in the seminary of the desert, a desolate place where the applause of fame faded into quiet solitude with God.

What happened to Paul in Arabia? I'll put the answer simply: a complete makeover of his inner person. Before his conversion, he was powerful. He was brilliant, aggressive, and active. None of that worked for him in Arabia. He became obscure.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17



Interpretation: Paul's Seminary of the Desert

In the interpretation phase, we try to answer key questions arising from the passage. To research your answers, you can use Bible study resources, such as Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. Also, consult the *IVP New Testament Commentary Series* at biblegateway.com or *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

Where did Paul go for solitude?

Look on the maps in your Bible or atlas to find the region known as Arabia. For an online map, refer to "*Paul's Missionary Journeys*." What strikes you about this area? Why do you think Paul chose solitude here?

What did Paul do during his solitude?

Paul cloaked his years in Arabia in mystery. We don't know what he did, exactly. Likely, the Lord was planting in Paul's mind the seeds of Christian doctrine, which fully bloomed in his later theological writings. Also, the Lord was honing Paul's character.

Paul may have been referring to his time in Arabia when he wrote *2 Corinthians 12:1–10*, which we studied previously. Reflect on this passage and *Philippians 3:5–11* as you imagine Paul in the wilderness. How do you think solitude with God helped Paul transform into a humble servant of Christ?



When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17

Through his desert training, Paul pieced together the puzzle of Old Testament prophecy pointing to Christ. He traced the overarching story line of Scripture to the foot of the cross and the empty tomb. In the desert, Paul understood the gospel *personally*—not simply as a theological truth but as a pathway to a deeper relationship with God.

What happened to Paul in Arabia? He lost the allure of the limelight, the appeal of public attention, the hunger for applause. Paul lived for it before Arabia. Following Arabia, he called himself a slave of Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Value of Training

Paul learned the value of spiritual training in the desert, and he continued his regimen throughout his years of ministry. Writing to his apprentice, Timothy, what did Paul say training offers, according to *1 Timothy 4:7–10*? What does it take to be godly?

Solitude can drive us deeper in our walk with God, but we need to be intentional with our time alone. In the final section, we'll explore disciplines you can put into practice.

Godliness doesn't just emerge. It's a matter of discipline. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17

Application: Disciplines for Solitude

How can you make the most of your solitude?

First, cast a vision for what solitude can do to deepen your relationship with God. Imagine yourself spending time alone with God, perhaps on a spiritual retreat or in a quiet place. What would you like God to do in you? In the space below, tell the Lord in a prayer what you are seeking from Him.

Second, organize your time of solitude. You may begin with worship, listening to praise songs or taking a prayer walk offering thanks for the beauty you see. Spend time in self-examination, following Psalm 139:23–24 as a guide from the “Prepare Your Heart” section above. Meditate on Scripture and write notes in a journal. Read an inspirational book or reflect on religious art. Share your heart in prayer with your Father. How would you like to organize your time alone with the Lord?



When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

Galatians 1:11–17

Third, make it a practice. Put your time in solitude on your calendar, just like you would a doctor's appointment or a meeting at work. When can you take time this week?

The more we meet God in solitude, the less we fear being alone. We see solitude as a refreshing place where we leave distractions behind and focus solely on God. Solitude is the best training ground for defeating greed and pride, and the most fertile ground for growing more like Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, when I am forced into isolation, help me not to fear being alone but to see it as a space for being with You. Help me to make the most of the “Arabia” experiences in my life. Guide me into a deeper walk with You through times of solitude. In Jesus’ name, amen.



CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY TWELVE

When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

The disciples were ready to occupy a throne to rule, but nobody wrestled over the towel to serve.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN our first *Searching the Scriptures* study, James urged us to see trials as “an opportunity for great joy” (James 1:3). How can one find joy in troubles? The answer lies in our perspective. Through the lens of fear, trouble looks terrifying . . . but through the lens of faith, we see that same trouble as an opportunity for God to act and for us to completely depend on Him.

Abraham, for example, viewed sacrificing Isaac as an opportunity for God to provide. David saw Goliath as an easy target for God to take down. For Joseph, imprisonment meant God would rescue him. Closed doors for Paul simply pointed him toward the one door God would open.

In every case we studied, after God acted, irrepressible joy followed. We can still hear Abraham and Isaac’s laughter as they descended the mountain together, David’s whoop of victory over Goliath’s hulking carcass, Joseph’s cries of happiness as he hugged his brothers, and Paul’s excitement as he weighed anchor for Macedonia.

James was right. Trials are fertile fields for great joy when, through our troubles, our great God produces something good in our world and in us.

This final study is set against the backdrop of the most severe adversity—Christ’s betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. The disciples were oblivious to the coming storm as they ate the Passover in the upper room. So, Jesus took the opportunity of the upcoming trial to teach the men a vital lesson in storm survival—how to stick together by humbly serving one another.



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S12
1

When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus came into the world “not to be served but to serve others” (Mark 10:45), and He calls us to do the same. As you open the Word, pray for Jesus’ humility to take root in your spirit.

Father, You know my struggles with serving others. Through my study of Your Word, melt my pride and mold my spirit into the shape of Christ’s heart of love and humility. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

To fill in some details about the setting, read [Luke 22:1–14](#), reviewing how the disciples secured a room to celebrate the Passover. Particularly, notice the diabolical forces at work behind the scenes. Also, don’t miss the undercurrent of conflict churning in the group. What were the disciples fighting over, according to [22:24](#)?

The Greek word for *argue* in verse 24 means “a verbal fight.” The disciples were sailing into the teeth of a monster storm, and what were they doing? Fussing over who got to wear the captain’s hat! How would Jesus teach them the humility needed to get along and be unified after He was gone? The future of the church depended on it. Let’s turn to John 13:1–17 to find out.



Observation: Humility Demonstrated and Explained

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step to examining a passage of Scripture is to observe the text through a literary magnifying glass. Read [John 13:1–17](#), observing the three main parts: the setting (13:1–3), the demonstration of humility (13:4–11), and the explanation of humility (13:12–17).



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

The Setting—John 13:1–3

The Passover feast celebrated the night of the Jews' deliverance from Egypt when the plague of death passed over the Jews' homes covered with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12). As the Lamb of God, Jesus would soon spill His blood to save the world from sin as the utmost expression of His love (*John 13:1*).

What evil cast its ominous shadow over the celebration, according to *John 13:2*?

With betrayal in the air, Jesus responded with love by humbly washing the disciples' feet . . . including Judas'.

There was no condition in Christ's love. He loved each one of them equally. He loved them deeply, consistently, sacrificially. He loved them all. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' Demonstration of Humility—John 13:4–11

Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet? First, because of something He *heard*—the disciples arguing about who was greatest (Luke 22:24–27). Second, Jesus washed their feet because of something He *saw*—their dirty feet.

It was customary for the first guests who arrived to wash the others' feet if no servant was present. However, each man considered himself too important to do the menial task. The disciples were ready to fight for a throne but not for a towel.



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

Put yourself in the place of the disciples as Jesus slowly made His way around the room. What would you have thought and felt as Jesus washed your filthy feet (*John 13:3–5*)?

How did Peter's pride show through his objections, according to *13:6–11*?

Jesus' Explanation of Humility—John 13:12–17

When Jesus finished, He put away the bowl and towel and reclined at the table. A hush settled over the room as all the men listened to Jesus explain His actions. Cleansed from pride as thoroughly as their feet were cleansed from dirt, their hearts were opened wide to receive a lesson about humility they would never forget.

How did Jesus explain the foot-washing object lesson, according to *John 13:12–17*? Put His teaching in your own words.



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

We might expect Jesus to say, “I’ve washed your feet, now you wash Mine.” But He didn’t say that. Who wouldn’t wash Jesus’ feet? The disciples would do anything for Jesus. Instead, He said, “Do this for one another.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Principles on Humility

Now let’s glean some principles about humility demonstrated by the supreme Servant when, without saying a word, He “got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin” (John 13:4–5). Jesus’ wordless actions teach what *first principle* about humility?

The *second principle* emerges as a contrast to Peter’s unwillingness to receive Jesus’ service. Review Peter’s responses to Jesus in John 13:6–9:

- “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”
- “No . . . you will never ever wash my feet!”
- “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!”

Peter put on a show of false humility, and then he tried to tell Jesus what He could and couldn’t do! Turn Peter’s wrong response into a positive principle about humility. What should humble people do when being served?



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

Peter responded with embarrassed pride. He wanted to come across as humble, but his resistance to Jesus kept him from being humble. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' direct responses to Peter model the *third principle* in John 13:7–10:

- “You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.”
- “Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me.”
- “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean.”

What principle about humility does Jesus' confident strength model?



Searching the Scriptures Digging Deeper

To understand Jesus' distinction between “bathed” and “wash” (John 13:10), read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on John*, page 247. For a free, online alternative, read the section on John 13:10–11 in *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org. Do a little digging on your own and write down what you discover.



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

The *fourth principle* shines through Jesus' unconditional love. He washed the feet of each disciple, even the feet of His betrayer. What was Jesus teaching His disciples (*John 13:1*; see also, *Matthew 5:43–48*)?

There are people who are tough to enjoy being with and to serve. But we serve them all.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul's Teaching on Humility

In the years that followed, Christ's humility became the standard for His church. What did Paul teach about humility based on Christ's example in the following passages?

Philippians 2:3–8

Romans 12:7–14



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

Why should we bless those who persecute us? Because that's what Jesus did. That's the Jesus way. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Putting on the Towel

Application allows the Bible's lessons to take hold in our lives. Review the four principles we learned in the text. Pastor Chuck Swindoll states them:

1. *Humility is unannounced.* We don't draw attention to our acts of service.
2. *Humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment.* Truly humble people admit their need, release control, and slip their dirty feet into the bowl to be washed.
3. *Humility is not a sign of weakness.* Strength is best demonstrated when we stoop to serve.
4. *Humility does not play favorites.* Doing the Lord's work His way means we serve everyone, even our enemies.

Which of these principles hits closest to home for you right now?



When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

We best serve the Lord by serving others. Remember, it's not enough to know about serving others. The blessing won't be ours until we put on the towel, kneel with a bowl of water, and start washing. What specifically do you plan to do this week and for whom?

The moving image of Jesus washing His disciples' feet forms a fitting conclusion to our studies on hope during trials. Like the disciples, we enter Jesus' banquet room with our feet caked in the filth of the world and unfit to dine at His table. He sees us as we are and moves toward us with a towel around His waist and a bowl of pure water. With His strong but gentle hands, He places our feet in the bowl and washes them clean. What affection He expresses in His tender touch!

Jesus expressed this same, servant-hearted love on the cross when He spilled His blood to cleanse our souls. Our greatest hope rests on Christ's sacrificial love, and it is to this hope we will forever cling.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You sent Your Son, Jesus, as my Master but also my Servant. Thank You for His ultimate act of love when He died on the cross to cleanse me. Just as He washed the soles of the disciples' feet, He purged my soul from the filth of my sin. Help me to receive His love, give His love, and even be humble enough to accept love from others. Amen.

