

THINGS THAT ENHANCE YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Meaningful Messages in Misfortune

Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:12–14

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Life can be hard. It's not a question of *if* tough times will come but *when* they will come. And in a culture that places a premium on instant success and blue-chip leaders, it's easy to get lured into believing that true ministry success results from our own competence. You may be surprised to learn that often the most lasting lessons in ministry flow not out of the rapid climb up the ladder of achievement but from the painful descent into the pit of failure.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The most trustworthy guidance in life and ministry comes from the Scriptures—particularly those passages that offer overt promises to us as followers of Christ as well as passages that illustrate faith amid trying times. Both flowed generously and freely from the pastoral heart of the apostle Paul.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. (Romans 8:28–30)

And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. (Philippians 1:12–14)

What joy to know how God works in and through and for us, especially in times of misfortune. Before diving into this study, pause to offer praise to Him for sustaining you and your family with His gracious provision during those times when you felt life spinning out of control!

Quotable

In this limited, tight radius called the “now,” we are forced to come to terms with the fact that what we’re going through presently doesn’t make much sense. But God has a purpose in it all.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: A Window into Meaning

By the way, it's important to understand that you don't need a seminary degree to search the Scriptures. You do, however, need a commitment to open the Word of God and *read* it. Observation, which unlocks the window to meaning, begins with reading the Bible. As you read you begin to see details that are repeated, phrases that highlight key ideas, and clues that reveal the author's original intentions.

Let's observe Philippians 1:12–14 in this way. Paul opened a window that reveals faith amid misfortune looks like. What details did Paul include that shines light through that window?

The verses immediately preceding the passage we're considering in this study set the context for the apostle's words:

But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Romans 8:25–26 NASB)

Paul reminded his readers that, unlike God, they could not see into the future, nor did they have sufficient knowledge of the future to pray effectively without the Spirit's help.

Interpretation: God's Higher Ways

In his message, Chuck Swindoll explained that the truths about God's sovereignty and omniscience help us understand how our misfortunes can become valuable lessons for life and ministry.

In Paul's letter to the believers at Philippi, he also illustrated how misfortune can turn to gain.

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How did Paul describe his situation? What do you sense was his attitude about being in prison for his faith?

What did Paul list as the benefits of his being imprisoned for the gospel? How did his misfortune become an opportunity for spreading the gospel?

What lessons might be learned from Paul's experience?

How does Paul's experience in a Roman house prison reflect his declaration of God's sovereignty in Romans 8:28–30?



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3

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Correlation: Threads of God's Sovereignty

The theme of God's sovereignty threads the entire Bible—from the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament. We can correlate the main verses of our study with other biblical passages to develop an increased understanding of God's character, God's actions, and God's instructions. And because both our passages are found in the New Testament, we glean a helpful perspective by correlating them with an Old Testament passage.

Chuck referenced a powerful passage in Isaiah 55 during his message delivered at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). Let's take a closer look at why Chuck chose Isaiah's ancient words.

*"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD.
"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8–9)*

Through the grand prophet Isaiah, God declared that His omniscience and eternal nature infinitely exceed our ability to understand Him. He is far above us in all possible ways.

How does God's declaration about His nature align with Paul's words in Romans 8:28–30 and Philippians 1:12–14?

How would you use Isaiah 55 to teach a Bible study lesson on learning to trust God in times of misfortune?



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Application: Making a Personal Connection

Chuck concluded his message at DTS with some pointed statements applicable to anyone desiring to serve as a minister of Christ's gospel:

- I hope you will not know early success. Rather, I hope you will encounter difficulties that drive you to your knees.
- I hope you will experience obscurity and anonymity after you leave these halls of learning—especially if you are greatly gifted and bright.
- I hope you will fail because you relied on your own flesh to reach certain goals. . . . You will learn far more from times of failure than through great accomplishments.
- I hope you will be forced to deal with a difficult leader (person) in the church you serve or face disagreements with someone with whom you serve closely.
- I hope you will be hindered by unexpected obstacles that keep you from reaching your goals in ministry as you had planned.

Ultimately, the only way to learn full dependence on the Lord is to experience misfortunes and failures that bring you to the end of your own resourcefulness. Only then can you turn in full confidence and humility to the One who delivered you from a past from which you could never recover and who leads you into a future you cannot see.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for this trial—this misfortune—that I face today. Forgive me for complaining about my circumstances and expressing such dismay at my current lot in life. Open my eyes to Your plans and purposes in the gathering clouds of defeat or failure . . . and shelter me with Your gracious presence and love until this storm passes by. In Jesus' name. Amen.



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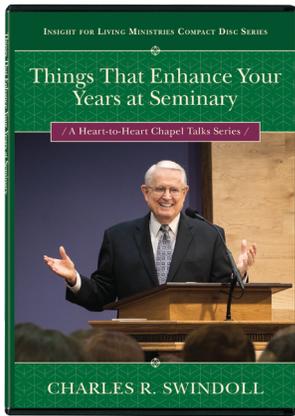
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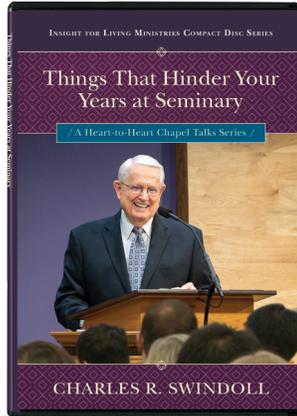
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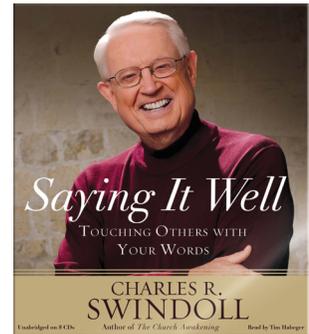
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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