

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY FIFTEEN

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

I am more impressed with Paul than I am with any leader I have ever studied. Woven through the texture of Paul's life—like gold and silver threads in a priceless garment—are qualities of leadership that deserve our special time and attention.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ON September 11, 2001, nineteen Al-Qaeda militants hijacked four commercial airplanes in a coordinated attack against the United States. The terrorists flew the airplanes like missiles into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center complex, collapsing the two massive 110-story buildings into heaps of twisted metal and smoking rubble. They crashed the third plane into the Pentagon and were targeting the US Capitol building with the fourth plane when the passengers bravely fought back. Flight 93 crashed into an empty field in Pennsylvania, killing everyone onboard, but saving the Capitol and all those inside. The final death toll from the attacks was 2,977, the deadliest terrorist assault on American soil in US history.¹

The violence poured out that day demanded a vigorous response. In his book, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the need for strong leadership.

The need of the hour was a series of clear and reassuring words about responsibility, vision, and courage. It was no time to sit and stare, immobilized by confusion and fear. Those savage acts of aggression called for words and actions that would bring confidence and reassurance to a country caught off guard. . . . Political rhetoric, screams of rage, and panicked responses would have left the nation seriously crippled. Heavy weights of hope and resolve hung on the thin wires of courageous leadership.²

The newly elected president George W. Bush rose to the occasion, demonstrating compassion to the grieving, resolve for the fearful, decisiveness in his response, and hope for the nation.



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We naturally look to those with a title, authority, and skill to lead. Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus earned a title, but he relentlessly wielded his authority like a battering ram against Christians, hoping to collapse the movement at its inception. After his conversion, however, Saul gladly relinquished his title and misguided authority, content to receive grace and boast in his weakness. Saul no longer needed a title to lead but, through a transformed nature, became a loving and impactful servant-leader.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we carefully consider Paul's leadership traits—not theoretical qualities derived from a manual but time-tested qualities, refined through the fire of eternally minded, sacrificial service to others.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you engage God's Word today, remember that "God is our refuge and strength," and, although the "nations are in chaos," we need not fear because "the LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us" (Psalm 46:1, 6, 7). Express through prayer your hope in God's supremacy.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

While on his second missionary journey, Paul proclaimed the gospel in Philippi but was badly treated by the authorities. Convicted on trumped-up charges, he was severely beaten and imprisoned, even though he was a Roman citizen.

Battered and bruised, Paul then traveled to Thessalonica and planted a church. Later, while in Corinth, he wrote his first letter to that church, 1 Thessalonians. For a refresher on the location of these cities, consult the Bible map, "[Paul's Missionary Journeys](#)," at [insight.org](#).

Like a family photo album, 1 Thessalonians holds treasured memories of Paul and the Thessalonian believers. Seven times, Paul reminds his readers how well they knew each other: "you know" (1 Thessalonians 1:5); "you yourselves know" (2:1); "as you know" (2:2); "as you well know" (2:5); "don't you remember" (2:9); "you yourselves are our witnesses" (2:10); "as you know" (2:11).

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Even this first look at the letter reveals a key to Paul's leadership style. What do you see in Paul's relationship with his readers?

Let's pick up our study in 1 Thessalonians 2 and find more qualities of godly leadership.



Observation: Paul . . . The Qualities of a Leader

Through careful reading and observation, identify in the following verses four negative traits of leadership to *avoid* and four positive traits to *adopt*.³

Four Negatives to Avoid—1 Thessalonians 2:1–6

After recalling the hardship he endured in Philippi, Paul reassured his readers of his intentions. What did Paul not do in his leadership, according to [1 Thessalonians 2:1–3](#)? How does this undermine leadership?

Based on [2:4](#), what was Paul's purpose as a leader, and what was *not*? Why is this quality so vital yet so difficult for many leaders?

What negative characteristic did Paul adamantly reject in [2:5](#)? What makes this vice so dangerous in leaders?

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What did Paul not seek, according to [1 Thessalonians 2:6](#)? How does avoiding this negative characteristic build trust?

The Thessalonians knew Paul. He was no distant celebrity. He was no penthouse-dwelling prima donna who lived away from them and above them. He walked with them and worked alongside them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Four Positives to Adopt—1 Thessalonians 2:7–11

As a servant-leader, Paul modeled four positive traits of effective leadership. What essential quality did Paul model in his leadership in [1 Thessalonians 2:7](#)? How does this quality build trust among followers?

Instead of maintaining “professional distance” from the Thessalonians, what did Paul do instead, according to [2:8](#)? Why is this essential for leaders who represent Christ?

What word or two sums up the character qualities Paul lists in [2:9–10](#)?

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Finally, no leader can be effective without this quality in [1 Thessalonians 2:11 NASB](#)? What is it?

Every one of us engaged in a profession has an enormous opportunity to take advantage of and to seek glory from others. Good leaders are not self-serving. Good leadership has a balance between the tenderness of a nursing mother and the affirmation of a caring father. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Paul . . . Apostle of Christ

Paul was no longer a Pharisee but an “apostle of Christ,” a title he said God gave him. “God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul wrote (Romans 11:13). Let’s look closer at what it meant to be an apostle.

The term refers to one who is sent as a messenger, but in the New Testament, it refers to those appointed by Christ for a special function in the church. In [Acts 1:21–22](#), what was an important criteria for being an apostle?

Skim the online article, “[Apostle](#),” in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Then read the section of this article, “Apostolic Authority,” and write down the responsibilities of the apostles. What authority were they given?

Paul witnessed the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, where He called Paul as an apostle. Paul used his authority to teach, to perform “signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Corinthians 12:12), and to pen the inspired Word of God. And yet, Paul never abused his authority ([1 Thessalonians 2:7](#)).

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Apostles no longer exist, but their qualities of leadership live on. What quality did Paul model for all those in Christian leadership? How can leaders know when to use their authority and when to restrain?

One of the most obvious marks of genuine humility is the restraint of those who have great authority. It's not what they display; it's what they hold back that reveals true leadership. They don't throw their weight around. They don't try to impress other people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul . . . From People-Pleaser to God-Pleaser

Paul's ability to consistently proclaim the gospel and lead in a God-honoring way, even in the face of continual adversity, was hewn from his unwavering gaze and singular concern: to live for an audience of One.

Before his conversion to Christ, Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, was consumed with people-pleasing. Read [Galatians 1:10](#) in the NASB. What one word in this verse points to his admission of that truth?

In [Ephesians 6:5–7](#), Paul taught that believers are to obey our earthly masters. As we serve others and serve those in authority, what was his point in 6:6–7? Who are we to please?

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In [2 Corinthians 5:9–11](#), Paul addressed his motivation for pleasing his Lord. What drove him to live a Christ-pleasing life?

You cannot be a faithful bond servant of Christ and spend your life making people happy, telling them what they want to hear. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Emulating Paul's Leadership Qualities

Among all of Paul's leadership qualities, enthusiastic encourager stands out. Paul's encouragement inspired others to follow him. He was riveted on the eternal rather than the temporal, and his desire was that his followers focus on the same.

[First Thessalonians 2:12](#) captures Paul's leadership goal. His desire? That his followers walk in a manner worthy of God! The reward? God's calling them into His kingdom and glory!

Let's take a personal inventory.

Which of Paul's leadership qualities do you most admire? Why? How does that strengthen your daily walk with Christ?

Reflect on the characteristics to avoid. In your life, do you find any deception? People-pleasing? Greed? Self-serving? If so, which? Take a moment to jot a brief prayer of confession to the Lord.

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Reflect on the list of characteristics to adopt. In your life, can you identify sensitivity to others' needs? Affection toward people? Authenticity of life? Enthusiastic affirmation of others? Where do you find the Lord blessing you and using you in these areas of leadership? Take a moment to write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus.

Why concern ourselves with these qualities as leaders? We lead like this so others will live like that—walking worthy of the God who calls them!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, dear Father, for never giving up on us, for working with us, and amazingly, by Your grace, working through us. Thank You for speaking in such a way that each one of us knows what the next step needs to be. Be with us as we take it, and let us never return to the way we were. Thank You for Christ, who not only comes to transform us but enables us and energizes us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. 9/11 Memorial and Museum, "9/11 FAQs," 911memorial.org/911-faqs; Peter L. Bergen, "September 11 Attacks," Britannica.com, britannica.com/event/September-11-attacks.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 215, 216.
3. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2001, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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