

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14

Few people had a greater grasp of grace than Paul. Redeemed from a life of violence and rigid legalism, Paul was gracious to the core. But he was also a man of grit, enduring the most severe hardships without complaining. He learned to live above his circumstances.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TIME is like a book. Somewhere, in some paragraph, you can find your name and the story of your life. You may try to thumb forward in time, but only God knows the words on those pages. If you're wise, however, you'll flip back and read about the men and women who have gone before you. Their stories teach valuable lessons that can change your present and determine your future.

Who made the most lasting impression on you? Whose life do you still try to emulate?

This person may be a parent or grandparent. A teacher or coach. A mentor who took you under his or her wing. Or a lifelong friend you still enjoy talking to even when you don't have much to talk about.

Through our studies, Paul may have made your list of personal heroes. Wouldn't it be great to talk with him in person? One subject that you probably would like to talk about is his face-to-face encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, the moment he changed from Saul to Paul—a slave of the law to a son of grace. From that flashpoint forward, he never viewed life the same.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll admire one quality Paul learned from his encounter with Christ: *his ability to live above his circumstances*. Despite his great suffering and even imprisonment, he always saw himself as a victor, not a victim. Christ made that happen for him. Wouldn't you like to live that way? Let's find out from Paul how he did it.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

To become a minister of grace, Paul first had to receive grace. As you open your study of God's Word, welcome God's grace in a prayer. Begin, "Father, I invite Your grace to fill my mind and refresh my soul." And then list the ways in which you need His grace today.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We concluded the previous study with Paul and the other passengers abandoning their wrecked ship and swimming ashore to the island of Malta. Witnessing their ordeal, some islanders rushed to their aid and "built a fire on the shore" to welcome the exhausted, soaked-to-the-bone survivors (Acts 28:2). Just as He promised, God saved the lives of every person.

During the three months Paul stayed on the island, God continued showing mercy by saving Paul from the bite of "a poisonous snake" (28:4) and by healing the sick through Paul's ministry. Finally, when winter passed, Paul and the others boarded a ship bound for Rome. At stops along the Italian coast, believers met Paul, welcoming him with open arms.

Finally, Paul arrived in Rome, just as God promised (23:11). While Paul awaited his trial before Caesar, he was "permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier" (28:16). Even though he couldn't step out his front door, his influence stretched far. What hopeful statements about Paul and his ongoing ministry closed the book of Acts in 28:30–31?

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul revealed how he lived above his circumstances, the eternal benefits of doing so, and the attitudes that resulted.



Observation: Living Above Our Circumstances

Use your observation skills to discover the ways Paul remained effective despite his arrest and confinement.¹

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How Paul Lived Above His Circumstances

Paul’s statement in *Philippians 4:13* explained how he endured when his own strength failed. What powerful truth do you observe in this verse?

Leaning on Christ for daily strength while trusting God to do His will behind the scenes allows us to live above our circumstances—which yields eternal benefits.

Eternal Benefits of Living Above Our Circumstances

Seeing God at work lifted Paul out of the mire of self-pity and helped him be joyful and positive. In the chart below, note the eternal benefits of living above our circumstances.

The Eternal Benefits of Living Above Our Circumstances	
<i>Philippians 1:12</i>	
<i>Philippians 1:13</i>	
<i>Philippians 1:14</i>	

A better response when people ask us how we’re doing is this: “You know what, in spite of it all, let me tell you the great things that God is doing.” This response is a good habit for us to learn. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Attitudes That Accompany Contentment

Sometimes, we allow our attitude to be determined by the ups and downs of our circumstances—like riding a roller coaster, going up during good times and down in bad. But Paul was even-tempered, regardless. How did he explain his attitude of contentment in *Philippians 4:11–13*? How was his contentment tied to his walk with Christ?

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Contentment doesn't come naturally. Paul had to learn contentment by resting in God's will and relying on Christ's power—who was with Paul and shining through him. In the verses in the following chart, write down the Christlike attitudes that Paul displayed and encouraged in others.

Attitudes That Accompany Contentment	
<i>Philippians 2:3–5</i>	
<i>Philippians 2:14–18</i>	
<i>Philippians 3:14</i>	
<i>Colossians 4:2</i>	

When Christ is given the controls of our minds, He journeys into our experience and blocks us from all bitterness, all blame, all self-pity. He changes us to be like Himself. The model of Christlikeness? The apostle Paul.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Contentment in Christ

Jesus said that whoever takes His “yoke”—in other words, “walks closely with Him”—“will find rest for [their] souls” (Matthew 11:29). Paul lived in Christ's yoke. It didn't matter whether his situation was comfortable or miserable, Paul was at rest because he was yoked to Jesus. His demeanor was regulated and consistent. His spiritual thermostat was always set on contentment in Christ's sufficiency.

You may be thinking, *I wish I had Paul's personality*. But wait. Contentment isn't a personality trait. Rather, it's a result of training. Imagine Paul explaining to you how he learned contentment and how you can follow in his footsteps. What do you think he would say?

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The key to Paul's spiritual equilibrium was his attachment to Christ. What did Paul mean when he said, "I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13)? To what was Paul referring in the context of [Philippians 4:10–12](#)?

What can Christ help you do through His strength?

Refuse to let your situation determine your attitude. Instead, let your attitude dictate your situation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Seeing through Eternity's Eyes

When we walk with Christ through hard times as Paul did,

- We may feel "pressed on every side by troubles" (2 Corinthians 4:8).
- We may be "perplexed" by the mysteries of God's will (4:8).
- We may be "hunted down" by our enemies (4:9).
- We may get "knocked down" (4:9).

And, like Paul, we may feel the weight of these circumstances dragging us under. When Paul felt himself sinking, however, he looked up. On what did he fix his gaze in [4:16–18](#)?

Throughout his ministry, Paul was brutally beaten, hounded by enemies, and abandoned by friends. And yet, his circumstances never crushed him or forced him to quit. Why? Because he viewed his suffering not as an impediment but as a path to achieving his life goal—"to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead" (Philippians 3:10).

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Application: Attitudes You Can Have Today

Reflect on Paul's attitudes and see if you can make them work for you. Let's list them.

Unselfish humility. Humility seeks the best for others and makes sacrifices for their sake. Jesus exhibited humility like none other. How can Christ express His humility through you?

Joyful acceptance. Listen to your words. If you're hearing a lot of complaining, Christ can help you accept your circumstances. How can He help you experience His joy despite them?

Strong determination. The quickest way to lose heart is to fix your eyes on your circumstances. Paul never gave up because he never let his eyes wander from Christ. What eternal view is God giving you to help you press on?

Genuine thanksgiving. Gratitude is like a spiritual vitamin that boosts your immunity to discouragement. What can you be grateful for today?

Christ's mighty power is available to you. Rest in Him. Let Him lift you above your circumstances and watch your spirit soar.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your goodness. Thank You for loving me and for knowing me so well. For forgiving me and removing not only my sin but also my shame. I am dependent on You, Lord, even for the breath in my lungs and the beat in my heart. I pray for comfort, hope, and reassurance in my current circumstances. Thank You for the joy of knowing Christ, who holds all things together, who is above all things, and who is in all things. In His sufficient name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. 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 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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