

# STRAIGHT TALK FOR SEMINARY STUDENTS

## STUDY ONE

### The Subtle Temptation of Greed

*Selections from 1 Corinthians 4*

*Whatever the setting of your ministry leadership, stay at it faithfully doing what you do. Through hardship. Through criticism. Through hate mail. Through boredom. Through sickness. Through ingratitude. Through sacrifice. It's all part of the role of a steward and an under-rower. It's part of being faithful. That's what's in front of us. That's our calling, so settle it in your mind. This is our future. This is what we do.*

—Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HOSE who say yes to ministry find no exemption pass waiting on their desk signed by the hand of temptation. In fact, temptation makes vocational ministers its special target, hoping to bring down their lives and ministries with such subtle sins as greed and envy. For this reason, God reminds us to “guard [our] heart[s] above all else” (Proverbs 4:23)—to watch closely what is attracting and motivating us—as the fight against temptation’s schemes will continue until we draw our final breath.

The apostle Paul knew this . . . perhaps better than anyone else. Throughout his writing, he addresses the topic of faithfulness in ministry. What faithfulness looks like. Why it is important. How to maintain it.

In his message, Chuck Swindoll directs us to one of those passages in 1 Corinthians 4 where the apostle Paul mused over the nature of his ministry. From it, Chuck encourages us to embrace the godly mind-set assumed by the apostle and to focus our heart on the eternal benefits of gospel ministry—two effective shields against temptation’s arrows.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## The Subtle Temptation of Greed

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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you peruse the secret mysteries of the Most High, pray that your Father would open your eyes to see and soften your heart to receive His Word that you may have the mind of Christ who desired one thing: the Father's glory. Record your prayer below.



### YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In his book *The Quest for Character*, Chuck describes the tenacity of our foe: greed.

*Nobody ever withstood greed without a fight that is both relentless and fierce. The god Fortune dies a slow, painful death.<sup>1</sup>*

We do not defeat greed by fighting it head-on. It will beat us. Rather, as ministers of the gospel, we fight it indirectly by turning our mind from what is tempting us and placing our thoughts upon God. Integral to this practice, then, is taking frequent swims in the bottomless pool of Scripture. In these *Searching the Scriptures* studies, we engage the Bible just like Chuck does, using four steps:

- 1) Observation: We read what the text says.
- 2) Interpretation: We seek to understand what the text means.
- 3) Correlation: We compare our biblical passage with other biblical passages.
- 4) Application: We incorporate the truths of our passage into our lives.



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Chuck wants us to remember that we study the Bible not only to sustain ourselves but others too.

The Word of God is the only thing that will feed starving, otherwise empty souls. The nourishment that we glean as we observe, interpret, correlate, and apply is not merely for ourselves. Our calling is to serve the hungry “the bread of life”—Jesus Himself (John 6:35).<sup>2</sup>

Keep that in mind as you complete these studies because you will never know when the time will come for you to share what God has taught you from His inspired Word.



### Observation: Paul Defends His Ministry

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul wrote about his relationship with the Corinthian church. Some had doubted his apostleship and connection to them, so Paul had to authenticate both. We learn much about ministry as the apostle described his work. Begin by reading *1 Corinthians 4* with that context in mind. Jot down a few initial observations you see concerning his ministry.

How did Paul describe his identity, and what responsibility accompanied that role (1 Corinthians 4:1–2)?



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According to 1 Corinthians 4:3–5, did Paul believe himself to be faithful in his role? Did it matter what he believed about himself? Why or why not?

According to 4:6–8, what toxic mind-set did Paul want the Corinthian believers to drop?

*The apostle speaks against boasting. It has no place in our lives. No place whatsoever. Not even little subtle hints toward ourselves. Little self-serving remarks in the few unguarded moments where we take the credit. None of that. Inappropriate. Out of place. Not good.*  
—Chuck Swindoll

How did Paul describe his apostolic ministry in 4:9–14?



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How did Paul connect his apostleship to the Corinthians in 4:15, and, according to 4:16, how did he want them to respond?

What did Paul do to help the Corinthians obey his command to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:17)?

What two options did Paul give for the manner in which he could arrive and why (4:18–21)?

Paul's immense love for the Corinthians, his sharp rebukes to correct them, his sacrificial service among them—it all flowed from his apostolic identity: “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (4:1 NASB).



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### Interpretation: Who We Are Fosters What We Do

During interpretation, we will focus only upon 1 Corinthians 4:1–2. The Corinthians still assumed a notion of authority not aligned with God’s kingdom values, so Paul used mundane language to convey the life of a ministry leader. Do not forget to grab your commentaries and other Bible study tools. Perhaps you will want to use the resources on [NET Bible](#) to aid your interpretation. Godly men and women over the centuries have spent countless hours studying our Divine Book to make its meaning plain for us all.

In what two ways did Paul want the Corinthians to view his and Apollos’ ministry (1 Corinthians 4:1)? What did these terms mean in Paul’s context, and how might their meaning affect the way in which ministry leaders view themselves today? Consult Barclay’s online [Study Bible](#) if your resources do not address this topic.

Paul said that he must be “faithful” (NLT) or “trustworthy” (NASB) in 1 Corinthians 4:2. Of this verse, commentator Thomas Constable wrote:

The most important quality in a steward is that he manage his master’s affairs so the desires of his lord materialize (cf. Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 16:1–13; 19:11–27; 1 Pet. 4:10). He must be faithful to his master’s trust. For Paul this meant remaining faithful to the gospel as he had received it and preached it (cf. 15:1–11).<sup>3</sup>

Why is this need for faithfulness important for us today as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God? How might greed hinder our faithfulness?



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Paul returned to the subject of his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9. The Corinthians owed their new lives to the gospel efforts of the apostle. Paul easily could have received their financial aid for this work, but he did not.

*If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:12)*

No one could claim that greed compelled Paul's gospel preaching. He fought the war on greed. He kept the mind of a servant and steward.

*I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (9:27)*



### Correlation: The Greed of Gehazi

Some in the biblical record did not see greed's deadly consequences. We read of such a person in 2 Kings 5:20–27. Earlier in chapter five, Elisha had just healed Naaman of leprosy. When Naaman offered payment to Elisha, he refused. Then Gehazi began to speculate about all the benefits of Naaman's lucrative offer.

See for yourself how greed can sway the hearts and minds of those in the Lord's work. Read [2 Kings 5:20–27](#).

How did greed materialize in the life of Gehazi, according to this passage?



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What other sins did greed lead Gehazi to commit?

*See, when you'll lie to yourself and when you'll lie to someone else, you'll have no problem lying to your master. —Chuck Swindoll*

What did Elisha mean with his rebuke in 2 Kings 5:26?

How might maintaining an eternal perspective help us fight the battle against greed?

*Be sure, your sins will find you out. You mess secretly with pornography, it is going to catch up with you. It isn't a secret. And if you are doing that, it is only a matter of time. So . . . deal with why you're doing it, and stop it. Don't live a lie. Don't cultivate a habit that will ruin the very ministry seminary is preparing you for. Don't go there. Tell yourself the truth. —Chuck Swindoll*



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### Application: Serving Faithfully Every Day

Take a moment to consider your temptations—perhaps it is greed, perhaps not. Like Chuck said, “Tell yourself the truth.” Record below those areas of weakness.

What do you do to battle this weakness? If you have not fully mastered it, is there something you need to change in your routine to achieve greater control over it?

What does it look like in your life to embrace the role of a servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1)? At work? At home? At school? Every person you encounter holds eternal importance in the eyes of Jesus. You never know what small act of service or small word of encouragement will be used by God to draw such a person into His adopted family.



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Lastly, plan one way this week you can encourage the pastor or pastors in your church. It does not have to be complicated or extravagant. Just something small. Record your plan below.

Finding our boast in Christ diminishes the power of greed. You have been given the very secrets of God. What more do you need? All the riches of the world last but for a moment, but Christ dispenses eternal hope and peace, joy and purpose, a new family and a new name.

*God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD." (1 Corinthians 1:30–31)*



### A FINAL PRAYER

Record a prayer below, making your boast in God for His work on your behalf through Jesus our Lord.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Quest for Character* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 22.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 231.
3. Thomas L. Constable, Note on 1 Corinthians 4:2, *Constable's Notes*, <https://netbible.org/bible/1+Corinthians+4>.

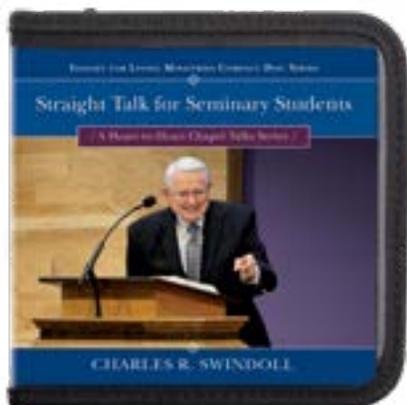


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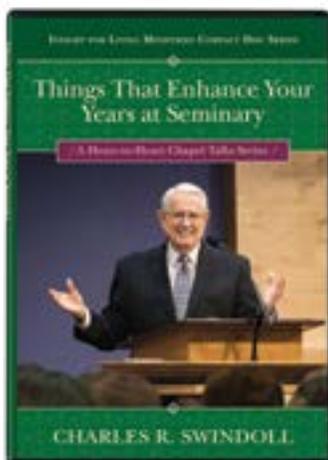
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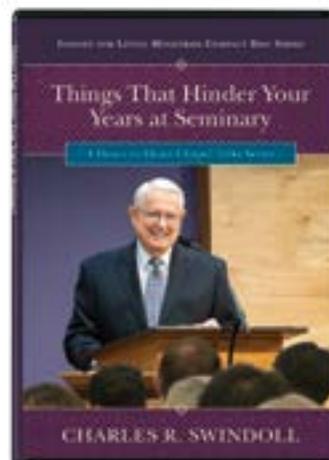
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

