



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The apostle Paul spent his final days in the Mamertine prison in Rome, awaiting his appointment with the executioner's blade. It was a horrid place. All the unfortunate souls who descended the stone steps into the Mamertine descended into despair. Hope flickered and died when prisoners crossed the threshold of their dungeon cell and heard the iron gate clang shut.

If there was any time in his life for Paul, in his 60s, to fold his hands and quit, it was then—and yet, he continued his ministry. The Christian-hating Nero could stifle the great apostle's voice, but he could not still his pen. From his dimly lit dungeon and with a determined hand, Paul wrote his final letter, 2 Timothy. This letter ignited a flame of inspiration for young pastor Timothy to never quit his calling and, after him, for future generations of Christians to fulfill theirs.



DIGGING DEEPER

The steel in Paul's fortitude was forged early in his ministry. Let's take a closer look at his previous jail experiences to discover some of Paul's character qualities that served him well at the end of his life.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

In the *Searching the Scriptures* process, a helpful exercise is to look for patterns of character in correlating passages. Bible students ask questions, such as, "Has Paul ever been in a similar situation? What can we learn about his character by comparing the situations?" In this case, by comparing Paul's imprisonments, we can glean deeper insights into his soul to help us when facing our own season of hardship.

Quotable

Those who are determined to stand fast are the people we most admire—the people of the Bible who refused to quit against all odds.

—Charles R. Swindoll



Fill in the following chart by reading the account, noting the location of the imprisonment and observing Paul’s qualities.

Verses	Location	Paul’s Qualities
Acts 16:22–31		
Acts 24:1, 22–27		
Acts 28:16–31		

Whether he was singing while locked in stocks or boldly preaching while bound in chains, Paul’s dauntless spirit soared despite the confined quarters of prison. What was the fire that burned in his soul’s furnace? A calling from God to *preach Christ* even in the most difficult circumstances (Philippians 1:18). “To live is Christ and to die is gain” was Paul’s life motto (1:21 NASB).

Remembering a sentence or phrase that concisely states your core values will help you never quit during trials. What is your life motto or life verse? Write it below, and if you’ve never selected one, take time now and ask God to help you find one.

Paul’s fire still burned hot in the cold, damp Mamertine dungeon. From this place, he could see storm clouds brewing on the horizon that would unleash a torrent of troubles for the young churches. Would their determination be equal to his? What could he say to pass on his flame?



A Frightening Prediction

After encouraging Timothy in the first two chapters of the letter, Paul reached through the page and grabbed the young man by the shoulders: “You should know this, Timothy” (2 Timothy 3:1 NLT). His attention focused, Timothy received Paul’s frightening prediction.

In the last days there will be very difficult times.¹ For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that! (3:1–5 NLT)

Sadly, Paul’s predictions could be today’s headlines. Or they could land much closer to home and describe your company’s newsletter or even your family’s Facebook page. Reread the list of characteristics, and highlight the ones that particularly describe the world in which you live.

Pause in your study of the Word to reflect on your emotions as you think about our dangerous, decadent times. Do you feel any fear? Discouragement? Have you had thoughts of giving up? As in a journal, write a prayer to the Lord sharing your feelings with Him.

A Passionate Reminder

Certainly, Timothy felt similar emotions. Like a loving but firm father, Paul spoke through his young friend’s fears to his core commitments: “But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you” (2 Timothy 3:14 NLT).



Timothy had followed Paul’s teaching and single-minded devotion to Christ. He was intimate with Paul’s ability to endure suffering, which included abuse like Paul experienced at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Timothy 3:10–11).

What persecutions did Paul endure in each of these three cities: Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (14:5–6), and Lystra (14:19)?

And yet, through every episode of suffering, Paul declared, “the Lord rescued me from all of it” (2 Timothy 3:11 NLT). Then he made a statement that causes many Christians to shudder: “Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will suffer persecution*” (3:12 NLT, emphasis added).

This warning could have derailed Timothy. But Paul bucked up his young friend with the phrase, *su de*, “But you.” “But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught” (3:14 NLT). In other words, never quit!

Urgent Commands

To steady Timothy’s hand on the helm of the church, Paul pointed him forward with five urgent commands, all based on a single focal point—the exposition of God’s Word.

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. (2 Timothy 4:1–2 NLT)

Can you pick out the five commands? Write them in the space below.



God's Word is the North Star by which we steer our ship; exposition is the skill required to stay the course. Chuck Swindoll defines *exposition*:

The process of learning and explaining the meaning and purpose of a given text. This might happen in a sermon, in a classroom, in a small group setting, or around the dinner table—wherever people are reading and applying a passage of Scripture.²

Just as Timothy's congregation could have, the people in our church may reject Bible exposition for ear-tickling stories and board a pleasure cruise of their own desires (4:3–4). But we must listen to Paul's call to keep our compass needle on true north, regardless the cost.

But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. (4:5 NLT)

With his life's clock ticking closer to its end, Paul wrote only what was most important. "Keep a clear mind," he exhorted Timothy, and us. "Don't be afraid. . . . Work at telling others the Good News . . . carry out the ministry." His pearls of wisdom polished by years of hardship and delivered from death's door offer us the wisest counsel for our troubled times.



Bring It Home

How can you stand firm? First, beware the tendency to compromise your convictions. Is there any area of your life that once was firm but now is soft? If so, what can you do to reinforce this moral weakness?

Second, resist the temptation to drift from the Word. Continue to use these *Searching the Scriptures* studies, and stay faithful to a church that focuses on the exposition of God's Word. And finally, remember to adhere to the truth. *Truth*, not majority opinion, will keep you strong.





A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Deliver me from the temptation to go elsewhere or to be satisfied with less. Keep me on course, and give me the power to hold on when fear weakens me and enemies distract me. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. “In the last days,” the days between Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem and His second coming in glory, “there will be very difficult times” (3:1). The Greek word for “difficult,” *chalepos*, is used only one other time in Matthew 8:28 where it describes two demoniacs as “extremely violent” (NASB). The word means dangerous, fierce, or menacing.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 191.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

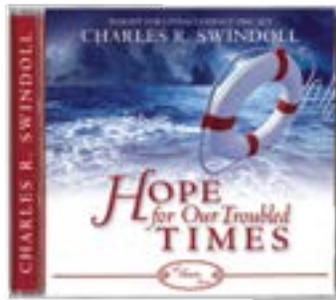
STUDY



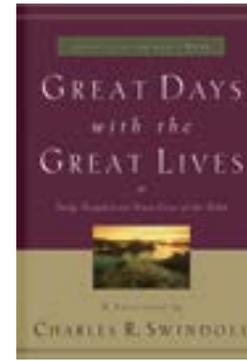
Tools for Digging Deeper



**Wise Counsel for
Troubled Times**
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



**Hope for Our
Troubled Times**
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD set



**Great Days with
the Great Lives**
by Charles R. Swindoll
softcover book

For these and related resources, visit www.insightworld.org/store
or call USA 1-800-772-8888 • AUSTRALIA +61 3 9762 6613 • CANADA 1-800-663-7639 • UK +44 1306 640156

For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



www.insight.org | www.insightworld.org

Copyright © 2013, 2017 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

S03
7