

## CLINGING TO HOPE

## STUDY ELEVEN

## When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

*Galatians 1:11–17*

*I want to make the most of times of solitude. I want to come back deeper. I want to be more authentic. I want to know Christ more and the power of His resurrection.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**M**ANY people fear being alone. Separation from loved ones feels like a dry and barren desert.

The Bible is full of examples of individuals whose circumstances drove them to a lonely place—Hagar shunned by Sarai, Elijah on the run from Jezebel, Moses wandering the wasteland of Midian. In each case, God came near them in their wilderness, and revealed Himself to them in a life-changing way. Their divine encounter assured them that they were never truly alone and that God had a special plan for them. With God, their desert of loneliness blossomed into a garden of grace.

When we see solitude as an opportunity for communion with our Father and deeper training in godliness, the fear of being alone fades. We seek out solitude. We intentionally slow our pace, escape the noise, and take time to know God more intimately and to examine ourselves more honestly. Other great men and women of the Bible met God in the wilderness, including Paul—whose season of solitude is the subject of this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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## When Solitude Drives Us Deeper

*Galatians 1:11–17*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Solitude creates a quiet space for God to minister to you. Use David’s prayer as you invite God to examine, counsel, correct, and lead you during your quiet time in His Word.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
Point out anything in me that offends you,  
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23–24)*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before his conversion, Paul (then, Saul) was a fanatical Pharisee, “a real Hebrew if there ever was one!” (Philippians 3:5). A strict observer of Jewish law, Paul became a militant defender of Judaism—a religious hit man of sorts, hunting for those he deemed lawbreakers, particularly followers of Jesus.

The early Christians feared Paul. Some believers fled persecution in Jerusalem and moved to Damascus. Paul found out and set out to Damascus to drag them “back to Jerusalem in chains” (Acts 9:2). On the way, however, Jesus stopped Paul in his tracks with a brilliant display of divine glory.

The light of Jesus’ glory blinded Paul instantly, but it also opened Paul’s spiritual eyes to his sin. The truth became clear. By persecuting Christians, Paul was fighting *against* God. But, mercifully, instead of condemning Paul, God gave Paul a special calling. Paul describes the impact of this moment of grace in Galatians 1:11–17.



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### **Observation: Solitude in Paul's Life**

Paul wrote Galatians to defend the gospel against Jewish legalists. In the opening section, Paul shared his conversion story to illustrate Christ's new way of grace. Observe Paul's own words as he explained his background in Judaism and how he came to understand the gospel.

What point about the gospel did Paul assert in *Galatians 1:11*? Why do you think this was an important place to begin his defense against the legalists?

According to *1:12–14*, how did Paul portray the intensity of his zeal for “the traditions of [his] ancestors,” which included the Hebrew Scriptures and all the extra-biblical rabbinical laws?



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Pharisee Paul was the ultimate legalist, which makes his switch to living under grace all the more striking. Only a direct call from God could have unchained Paul's law-bound heart. How did Paul describe God's call in *Galatians 1:15–16*? For background, read *Acts 9:1–16*.

Paul had much to learn about how the Hebrew Scriptures pointed to Christ and Christ's new way. Who did Paul not consult, according to *Galatians 1:16–17*? Instead, where did he go for his training? How did this fact add credibility to Paul's argument?

In today's world, Paul might have immediately hit the celebrity speaking circuit . . . but no. He did just the opposite. He retreated to obscurity for three years (*1:18*). He enrolled in the seminary of the desert, a desolate place where the applause of fame faded into quiet solitude with God.

*What happened to Paul in Arabia? I'll put the answer simply: a complete makeover of his inner person. Before his conversion, he was powerful. He was brilliant, aggressive, and active. None of that worked for him in Arabia. He became obscure.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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### Interpretation: Paul's Seminary of the Desert

In the interpretation phase, we try to answer key questions arising from the passage. To research your answers, you can use Bible study resources, such as Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*. Also, consult the *IVP New Testament Commentary Series* at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) or *Constable's Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

#### *Where did Paul go for solitude?*

Look on the maps in your Bible or atlas to find the region known as Arabia. For an online map, refer to "*Paul's Missionary Journeys*." What strikes you about this area? Why do you think Paul chose solitude here?

#### *What did Paul do during his solitude?*

Paul cloaked his years in Arabia in mystery. We don't know what he did, exactly. Likely, the Lord was planting in Paul's mind the seeds of Christian doctrine, which fully bloomed in his later theological writings. Also, the Lord was honing Paul's character.

Paul may have been referring to his time in Arabia when he wrote *2 Corinthians 12:1–10*, which we studied previously. Reflect on this passage and *Philippians 3:5–11* as you imagine Paul in the wilderness. How do you think solitude with God helped Paul transform into a humble servant of Christ?



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Through his desert training, Paul pieced together the puzzle of Old Testament prophecy pointing to Christ. He traced the overarching story line of Scripture to the foot of the cross and the empty tomb. In the desert, Paul understood the gospel *personally*—not simply as a theological truth but as a pathway to a deeper relationship with God.

*What happened to Paul in Arabia? He lost the allure of the limelight, the appeal of public attention, the hunger for applause. Paul lived for it before Arabia. Following Arabia, he called himself a slave of Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: The Value of Training

Paul learned the value of spiritual training in the desert, and he continued his regimen throughout his years of ministry. Writing to his apprentice, Timothy, what did Paul say training offers, according to *1 Timothy 4:7–10*? What does it take to be godly?

Solitude can drive us deeper in our walk with God, but we need to be intentional with our time alone. In the final section, we'll explore disciplines you can put into practice.

*Godliness doesn't just emerge. It's a matter of discipline. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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### **Application: Disciplines for Solitude**

How can you make the most of your solitude?

*First, cast a vision for what solitude can do to deepen your relationship with God.* Imagine yourself spending time alone with God, perhaps on a spiritual retreat or in a quiet place. What would you like God to do in you? In the space below, tell the Lord in a prayer what you are seeking from Him.

*Second, organize your time of solitude.* You may begin with worship, listening to praise songs or taking a prayer walk offering thanks for the beauty you see. Spend time in self-examination, following Psalm 139:23–24 as a guide from the “Prepare Your Heart” section above. Meditate on Scripture and write notes in a journal. Read an inspirational book or reflect on religious art. Share your heart in prayer with your Father. How would you like to organize your time alone with the Lord?



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*Third, make it a practice.* Put your time in solitude on your calendar, just like you would a doctor's appointment or a meeting at work. When can you take time this week?

The more we meet God in solitude, the less we fear being alone. We see solitude as a refreshing place where we leave distractions behind and focus solely on God. Solitude is the best training ground for defeating greed and pride, and the most fertile ground for growing more like Christ.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, when I am forced into isolation, help me not to fear being alone but to see it as a space for being with You. Help me to make the most of the “Arabia” experiences in my life. Guide me into a deeper walk with You through times of solitude. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

