

THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

People Who Make the Ministry Difficult

2 Timothy 3:1–5

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

A great paradox pervades life: people bring out in us the most exuberant smiles . . . and the heaviest tears. Yet nothing offers more reward—nor creates the most risk—than making ourselves vulnerable through acts of selfless love. Ministry amplifies the risks and rewards because it's all about people, and that compels all Christians to learn how to deal with the troublemakers.

We see this paradox in the life of the apostle Paul. A radical realist as well as an energetic optimist, Paul found the positive behind prison bars. He didn't put his head in the sand but acknowledged the pain the unruly produce, and he taught future gospel ministers how to navigate the rough waters of difficult people. We'll look at that topic with Chuck Swindoll, a man who has spent more than fifty years working in the church.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this three-part series, Chuck focuses on three difficult aspects of ministry. All Christians serve in some capacity whether vocationally or avocationally, so we all must know how to handle difficulties, and even avoid some of them, if we want to minister effectively. Three areas of difficulty are:

1. **People:** those with whom and to whom we minister
2. **Ourselves:** harmful vices and destructive habits we carry
3. **Circumstances:** uncontrolled and unforeseen events that bombard our time and assault our peace

Let's examine *2 Timothy 3:1–5* using Chuck's four-step *Searching the Scriptures* process: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. Helpful resources are vital to anyone who wants to grow deep in his or her knowledge of the Bible. For this study, you may consider purchasing Chuck's commentary *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* from his excellent Living Insights New Testament Commentary series.

Quotable

I want you to get into and enjoy, as best you can, a life of ministry even as you live in this depraved world.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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First, however, we should pray before engaging God's Word. Write your own prayer below, asking God's Spirit to strengthen you during this series that you may grow in wisdom, perseverance, and confidence to navigate the difficulties of ministry.



Observation: Reading Carefully

Patience and focus fuel observation. We need no extra resource and no seminary degree to be a keen observer of the text. We just need to read it. Thoroughly. Repetitively. Reflectively. That's what we'll do with 2 Timothy 3:1–5. You may even read multiple translations. Chuck's favorites are the *New Living Translation* and the *New American Standard Bible*.

Write down what you observe, looking for the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* of the paragraph.

It's often helpful to finish the detailed analysis of observation with a simple subject-complement summary. We summarize the passage's topic (i.e., the subject) and then articulate what the author says *about* the topic (i.e., the complement). For example, if the subject of a paragraph is **money**, then what the author says **about money** is the complement.



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Write down the subject of 2 Timothy 3:1–5.

In a simple and clear sentence, write what Paul said about this subject.



Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Thorough observation allows for an enriching interpretive experience because we can better know what questions to answer, what cultural norms to learn, and what words to define. And our passage has many words! In fact, Paul used nineteen different terms or phrases to describe difficult people in these last days.

Using Chuck's commentary or *Constable's online commentary*, peruse the meaning of each of the eighteen descriptors of difficult people characterized in 2 Timothy 3:2–4. Record those insights that are especially helpful for you in understanding this passage.

The nineteenth and last portrayal of difficult people is especially poignant for our topic. Notice how it says such people have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5). What does that look like in a person? What would that look like in a church leader?



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This stark picture of people’s dark side—especially those in the church—will aid us to be more effective ministers. Chuck says it well in his commentary: “Over the years, Paul’s realism in these verses has kept me from becoming disillusioned.”¹ Backbiters don’t surprise us—they’re just part of ministry, part of life. But we risk for the reward because we know God transforms people with His radical love. So we refuse to let the backbiting turn us into bitter cynics who have no enthusiasm in our service.



Correlation: Comparing Precisely

Because core truths and life principles thread the entire Bible, we correlate the main verses of our study with other biblical passages to develop an increased understanding of God’s character, God’s actions, and God’s instructions.

Matthew 10 addresses the same idea as *2 Timothy 3:1–5* but from an alternative vantage point. *Matthew 10* contains Jesus’ directives, warnings, and encouragements to His disciples as He sent them out to proclaim His gospel. Review this chapter and record how it complements what you’ve learned from *2 Timothy 3:1–5*.



Application: Integrating Thoroughly

After reflecting on *2 Timothy 3:1–5* as well as on his decades of gospel ministry, Chuck provides ten principles to add to our bucket of wisdom for ministering effectively. Contemplate each principle, and choose one most relevant to your season of life.

1. *Be extremely cautious regarding those you endorse to fill leadership roles.* Because leaders have such influence in the ministry, take time to thoroughly weigh each candidate’s character, personality, and skill set to ensure he or she will not bulldoze relationships or hijack ministry goals.



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2. *It's easier to find purity than confidentiality.* Know that what you choose to share with one may be heard by many—even if that person has no ill-intent in repeating what you said. Develop a few key relationships with people who won't broadcast across the town or Web what you've said in confidence.
3. *Watch out for those who play a significant role in your being called to a particular place of ministry.* Your most vocal proponents may have hidden reasons for supporting you and may undermine you later if you don't promote their agenda. When joining a ministry, get to know a cross-section of people, and beware the flatterers.
4. *Keep your distance from the opposite sex.* Avoid car drives or lunches alone with the opposite sex. Don't get emotionally attached. Actively guard against any temptation or appearance of infidelity if you're married or immorality if you're single.
5. *No matter how much you need it, don't take money from anybody.* Don't give anyone reason to accuse you of greed after preaching or teaching. Have them put the money in the offering plate at the end of a service.
6. *Some people are not just difficult, they're dangerous.* Jesus promised persecution would persist until His next coming, and so it continues in our day. The dangers are plenty: deranged folks threaten to kill Christian ministers, scam-artists rob ministries and gullible Christians, and vindictive individuals assault the integrity of prominent Christian leaders—to name a few. Be as “shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).
7. *When you are targeted by the enemy, some do not have your good at heart.* Some members do not intend only to drive their agenda in the church or nonprofit ministry—they plan your downfall, failure, and humiliation in the process. Live above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2).
8. *When hiring or releasing someone from your ministry, do not manipulate the process.* If the ministry of which you're a part has developed an effective system to vet candidates and release those who don't fit into the ministry's culture, don't insert your influence and deviate from the plan. Emotions can run high in these circumstances, preventing rational thinking. Stick to your ministry's process.
9. *When you're led to leave a place of ministry, do not expect everyone to understand and affirm your decision.* Because others don't have the privilege of your perspective, don't anticipate all will see your rationale for leaving—especially if they really like you. Know that you can't control how another person feels or thinks, so it's best to accept your limitations and avoid unnecessary paralysis or relational anxiety.
10. *If you're married, your relationship with your spouse is the single most important relationship in your life aside from your relationship with Jesus.* Schedule consistent time with your spouse. Pray together. Read the Bible together. Prioritize quality time with your spouse.



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Certainly more than one of the principles above speaks to your current situation, but pick just one to meditate upon. After prayerfully thinking it over, write down what you need to do in light of that principle and your circumstance.

Remember the inestimable worth of every single person. Remember Jesus' love for you despite your evil nature, disobedience, and lack of faith. We all have strayed from Him, but He searches for us as a loving shepherd. He instructs us—sometimes with the rod of discipline. He always loves us with a tender, unconditional love—the kind of love that can melt the hardest of hearts, soften the steeliest of wills, and uplift the lowliest of our days. It's that love that allows us to walk in divine power as we minister in the presence of difficult people.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You know how difficult I can be. You know my desire to live with integrity, to have an upright heart that follows Your ways and expresses a nonjudgmental love toward those to whom I minister. Please give me wisdom to navigate the inconvenient political and relational troubles caused by difficult people, and give me the strength not to retaliate with anger but with love. I pray this so Jesus might be glorified in my life. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 11 (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 228.



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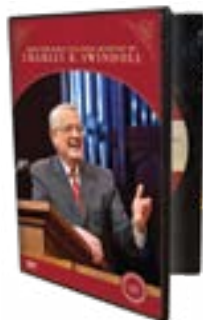
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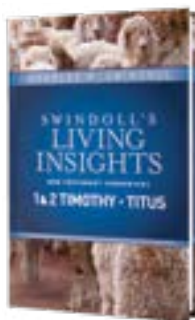
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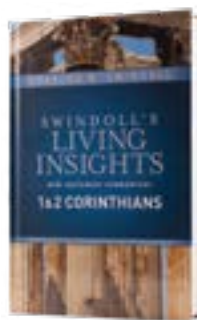
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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