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CHRIS LITTLECHILD
CEO Insight For Living
Australia

Dear Reader, I hope you enjoy this issue of our Insights magazine. We have worked hard to provide you with a range of thoughtful articles we hope will inspire and challenge you to grow deeper in your knowledge and faith of our Lord and Master—Jesus Christ. If you have any stories about your life or experiences you think might be of interest and value to our Christian readers, please feel free to send them in to our head office.

A Christmas Masterpiece

by CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

Before time began, God had in His mind's eye a masterpiece—a beautiful picture of grace that His beloved Son, the second person of the Trinity, would illustrate with His life.

Even before the breathtaking splendour of creation, God sketched out His plan for His perfect fellowship with humanity. But not long after He had splashed colour on the landscape, the deep, dark shadows of man's rebellious choice to live independently of His grace obscured the beauty of God's work. Coal black, pitch darkness enveloped the scene, and all creation hung in suspense of what God would do.

How could God redeem His masterpiece? What could rescue us, the pitiful portraits in whom breathed God's breath?

Then, with a heart weeping for His people, God dipped His brush in Calvary's scarlet ink, and pinned it against an empty sky for all the world to read. Bold, crimson words: "I love you."

This is the message of Christmas: Because He loves us, God has come to redeem us—to bring life and colour back to our lives, to expel the darkness of our hearts and from our world.

On a rescue mission designed by His Father before time began, Jesus silently slipped into our world, breathed our air, felt our pain, became acquainted with our sorrows, suffered and died for our sins . . . to show us the way out of our darkness and into His glorious light.

This Christmas, may you know the warmth of the Saviour's love spreading over you as you never have before. May the beauty of the season remind you of His intense concern for every detail of your life and His great, sacrificial love for you.

Merry Christmas from all of us at Insight for Living Ministries. ■

**May Christmas remind you
of God's intense concern
for every detail of your life.**

Charles R. Swindoll serves as the senior pastor-teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

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I have some good news for you: God's goal is not to make sure you're happy. No matter how hard it is for you to believe this, it's time to do so.

Life is not about your being comfortable and happy and successful and rich and pain-free. Rather, life is about becoming the person God has called you to be. We will rarely hear that message in much of our consumer-driven Christianity today. All the more reason for me to say it again: Life is not about you! So then . . . what is it about? - It's about God.

How can I say that with assurance? Because of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10:

by CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

GOOD NEWS!

Life is not about you.

uuh?



Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. That's it! As Paul sought to fulfil the Great Commission in Europe, he faced innumerable trials. He mentioned only a few. Nevertheless, Paul understood what life is about . . . and he went with it for the rest of his days. We must do the same.

When you and I boast of our strengths, we get the credit . . . and we keep going under our own head of steam. Bad plan. But when we boast in what Christ is doing in the midst of our brokenness, inabilities, and inadequacies,

then He comes to the front where He belongs. His strength comes to our rescue. He is honoured. It's all about Him.

You see, the very things we dread and run from in our lives are precisely what brought contentment to Paul. Don't miss that as you read through Paul's list:

- **I am content when I lose.**
- **I am content when I am weak.**
- **I am content with insults.**
- **I am content when I am slandered.**
- **I am content in distresses.**
- **I am content with persecutions.**
- **I am content with difficulties and pressures that are so tight I can hardly turn around.**

These are contexts of contentment? Seems impossible! Paul tells us how he did it: because "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). Read that again. Knowing this truth brought the apostle to his knees, ablaze with the flaming oracles of heaven. Paul understood that it wasn't all about him. It was about God. What a way to live your life! Content in everything . . . knowing that divine strength comes at the time when human weakness is evident.

Quite remarkably, we never read where Paul said to his Roman guard, while he was in prison: "I need you to do me a favor. Next time you happen to be near one of the emperor's assistants, urge him to get me out of this dump. I shouldn't be here in the first place. I've been here for one year, seven months, four days, five hours, and nine minutes, and that's long enough." Paul's attitude of unselfish

humility prevented him from keeping meticulous records of the wrongs done to him in Rome, or anywhere else for that matter. He was in prison by divine appointment. Paul understood that God had prepared his situation beforehand, and the apostle willingly submitted to his situation. How could he? It was all about God.

Do my words find you today in a place you'd rather not be? If you want to learn Paul's secret of genuine contentment, the perfect place to begin is by developing an attitude of unselfish humility. Start with your family or friends. Model it before your employees or clients. You won't believe the impact that sort of selfless mental attitude will have on others—and on yourself.

Let me add that this sort of humility doesn't mean we walk around looking like the poster child for the book of Lamentations. On the contrary, Paul exhorts believers to have an attitude of joyful acceptance. That's right—joyful. Paul minced no words about how believers should act:

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world. (Philippians 2:14-15)
Paul sought an attitude of joyful acceptance, free of petty disputes, bickering, and whining—he pled for authentic joy. I urge you to live this way . . . and the results will amaze you.

After all, it's not about you. It's about God. ■

Charles R. Swindoll serves as the senior pastor-teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

The Benefits of BREAKDOWNS

by CHARLES R. SWINDOLL



Who would've ever guessed it? Out of the blue came this nobody. He had spent his youth working for his dad in the quiet, rugged outdoors. Now, suddenly, he was the most famous man in the country. But he couldn't wait to retreat to the hills where life was simple and uncluttered.

That first night back under the stars must have been a restless one as he recalled the frightening scene of battle . . . the intimidating sound of the giant's voice as it echoed across the chasm . . . the feel of those five smooth stones . . . the deadening thud as rock struck forehead . . . the shout of triumph . . . the admiring look of dismay from the tall Israelite king. Now, silence.

Little did the lad know that God would lead him to more valleys—deeper than he could have dreamed possible. The events that followed the giant killing defied logic.

Even though David conducted himself with humility, loyalty, and grace, the man whose face—and life!—he had saved turned against him. Displeased by the boy's popularity, insecure over his own eclipsed public image, King Saul became a savage, driven mad by suspicion and jealousy.

In spite of this tragic twist in their relationship, David prospered. Three times in the biographical account we read that fact (1 Sam. 18:5, 14, 15). In addition, "he behaved

himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul" (18:30). This led to growing popularity, increased favour in the eyes of Saul's inner circle, military victories, and enormous praise from the public. David found himself sandwiched between public applause and private horror.

It is easy to forget that two magnificent, lasting benefits were born out of that womb of woe: first, the deepening of much of David's character; and second, the composing of many of David's psalms. The traits we remember and admire as being worthy of emulation were shaped, honed, and polished while he lived like a fugitive in the wilderness, and the psalms we turn to most often emerged from a broken heart.

Where are you today? Has there been a recent breakdown? A trust no longer there? A friend no longer near? A dream no longer clear? A future no longer bright?

Take heart! It is in that precise crucible that God can (and often does) do His best work!

Some of your best traits and some of your finest works will grow out of the incredibly painful periods of your life.

How about you? ■

Charles R. Swindoll serves as the senior pastor-teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

It isn't pretty, but it's here to stay. It occurs in every life and in every season of the year. I call it the "daily grind."

Homemakers face 14-hour days with ever-present children and an endless grind of responsibilities. Students endure the grind of assignments, classes, deadlines, and exams. Salespeople have quotas to meet. Musicians must constantly rehearse.

Psychologists can't escape one depressed soul after another. Husbands have grass to mow and things to fix each weekend. Preachers forever face the ever-present grind of sermon preparation.

Fact is—let's face it—the grind isn't going away! Instead of fussing about it or dreading it, we must find a way to live beyond it. How? Songs! But not just any songs.

I have in mind a songbook that's really old. In fact, it's one of the first-ever songbooks composed, inspired by our Creator-God. Its timeless songs were written specifically to help us live beyond that grind of daily life. That's right, beyond it. Why else would God have inspired those age-old compositions called psalms? They are timeless songs that have yielded delicious fruit in every generation. Surely, He realized the lasting value of each musical masterpiece and therefore preserved them to help us persevere. They drip with the oil of glory that enables us to live beyond the grind. Here's what I mean:

When frightened, who hasn't been comforted by, "**The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want**"? That's Psalm 23.

Who hasn't felt strangled by guilt and found soothing relief from, "**According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me . . . cleanse me**"? That's Psalm 51.

And on those days when we feel forgotten, who hasn't felt assured by, "**He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty**"? That's the immortal Psalm 91.

Don't think that just because summer's ahead that the grind will take a vacation. Not on your life! It will still be there. But this summer, for a change, let's live beyond it.

Choose some psalms to include in your personal reading time this summer. To help make them stick, don't try to digest too great a meal in one sitting. Consider these songs as rich food to be savoured slowly. Too much too fast would be counterproductive. Let me urge you to take your time, to read each psalm you select carefully, to give your mind time to digest each one slowly, and to enter into its practical application meaningfully.

I believe these time-tested lyrics will add just enough nourishment to our days to enable us to live out the truths of these psalms. Otherwise, our long days would never end and the wearisome road before us would never bend. How grateful I am for these inspired songs!

God's people need to sing His songs frequently . . . and allow their time-tested lyrics to feed our souls. When we do, we begin to live beyond the grind. ■

Live Beyond the DAILY GRIND

by CHARLES R. SWINDOLL



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TRUE TEAMWORK

...What it takes

by CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

As a lifelong admirer of President Abraham Lincoln, I have devoured more than a few biographies about him. Among the best was *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin, a volume that presents Lincoln's brilliant political act of enlisting into his cabinet some of the men who had run against him. Surrounded by a team that didn't believe in the viability of the Thirteenth Amendment and pressured by men in his own party to compromise with the South to end the war sooner, Lincoln refused to fold. He challenged his peers to rise above their doubts, to act upon their shared goal of ending slavery in America, and to press hard against the opposition. In the end, Lincoln's convictions carried the day. Against all odds, clinging to hope against hope, he led this team of rivals to achieve the defeat of slavery.

John Stemmons, a well-known Dallas, Texas, businessman, was asked to make a brief

statement on what he considered foundational to developing a good team. His answer was crisp and clear: "Find some people who are comers, who are going to be achievers in their own field . . . and people you can trust. Then grow old together."¹

One of the best illustrations of that was the Billy Graham evangelistic team—the inner core of people whose names are now legend. In a day of job hopping and a Lone Ranger mentality, it is refreshing to remember such a close-knit circle of capable and gifted people, each one different and distinct, growing old together yet still very much a solid team.

Don't misunderstand. Group loyalty is not blind allegiance or harboring incompetence. Neither is it nepotistic prejudice which conveys the idea that everyone else is wrong except our little clique. Nor is it so tight and so proud that it appears closed and secretive.

Rather, there is freedom to be, to develop, to innovate, to make mistakes, to learn from them . . . all the while feeling loved, supported, and affirmed. Such a context has been called "management by friendship." Instead of suspicion and putdowns, there is trust that builds esprit de corps within the team. Stress is held to a minimum because love flows and laughter is encouraged. Who doesn't develop in a secure environment like that?

In another bestselling biography, *American Caesar*, William Manchester introduces his readers to an in-depth acquaintance with Douglas MacArthur. He helps us feel closer to that strong personality as he digs beneath the intimidating exterior and unveils many of MacArthur's magnetic characteristics as well as strange quirks. At one part, the author analyzes the remarkable loyalty that Colonel MacArthur elicited from his troops during World War I. How did he pull it off? Here is Manchester's analysis in a nutshell: He was closer to their age than the other senior officers; he shared their discomforts and their dangers; he adored them in return.² Regardless of the man's well-publicized egomania and emotional distortions, MacArthur possessed a major redeeming virtue that eclipsed his flaws in his men's eyes and fired their passions: he genuinely and deeply cared for them.

Nothing—absolutely nothing—pulls a team closer together or strengthens the lines of loyalty like love. It breaks down internal competition. It silences gossip. It builds morale. It promotes feelings that say, "I belong" and "who cares who gets the credit?" and "I must do my very best" and "you can trust me because I trust you."

Jesus' team of disciples was hardly the epitome of success when they got started. If there ever was a "team of rivals," this was it! One would have wondered why the Lord selected them. The genius of His plan was not immediately obvious. But by the end of the first century, no one would fault His selection. Except for the betrayer, they were "comers," they proved themselves "achievers in their own field," and they became "people you can trust." Ultimately, they were responsible for turning their world upside down . . . or should I say right side up? Whichever, no group in history has proven itself more effective than that first-century evangelistic team, the inner core of Christ's men.

Maybe you are in the process of putting a group together—a special team of people to accomplish some significant objectives. Here's a tip worth remembering: instead of just going for big names or starting with a few hotshots, look for some comers, achievers in process, truly trustworthy folks. Love them to their full potential as you cultivate a long-haul friendship. Then watch God work. A team drawn together by love and held together by grace has staying power. I suppose we could call that growing old gracefully.

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1. Alan Loy McGinnis, *Bringing Out the Best in People: How to Enjoy Helping Others Excel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1985), 152.

2. William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880–1964* (New York: Hachette, 2008), e-book.

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DON'T BE Afraid



The hour of 1:00 a.m. comes every night, but there's one 1:00 a.m. I'll never forget. While you were likely sound asleep, I was wide awake . . . talking to God like mad!

I was aboard a small twin-engine plane with a seasoned pilot, rapidly descending through a foggy, dense overcast sky at 200 miles per hour. The pilot was having the time of his life . . . but, frankly, I was scared spitless! At one point he looked over at me, grinned, and said, "Hey, Chuck, isn't this great?" I didn't answer since I was praying.

As our lonely plane cut through the cloudy,

pre-dawn sky, I reviewed every verse I knew and confessed every wrong I'd ever done. The closest comparison I can think of is speeding a couple hundred miles an hour down a rush-hour freeway with a white bedsheet wrapped across the windshield and the radio turned up just beneath the threshold of audible pain!

I couldn't believe how happy and excited my companion-in-flight really was. His passenger, however, had ten fingernails imbedded in the seat cushion. I stared longingly for something—anything—through the blanket of white fog surrounding us. Our flight record may have indicated two passengers on that

erie Monday morning, but I can vouch for at least three. An unyielding creature called Fear and I shared the same seat. Fear. What a monster! Razor-sharp claws, dripping with the blood of the unknown and unseen. Piercing voice, shouting ugly, destructive words of worry. Most of Fear's statements begin with a quiet, "What if . . . ?" and end with a loud ". . . and you'll be sorry!" One blast of its awful breath transforms saints into cynics.

Fear can reverse our entire mind-set. Its bite shoots a paralyzing venom into our veins, and before long, doubt dulls our vision. As we fall, Fear steps on our face with the weight of a massive tank . . . and laughs at our crippled condition as it prepares for another pounce. Ever met this beast? Sure you have. It comes in all shapes and every size. Fear of failure. Fear of heights. Fear of crowds. Fear of disease and death. Fear of rejection about you. Fear of leaving the familiar. Fear of disaster or depth or distance. Fear of trusting others. Fear of being yourself. Fear of buying. Fear of selling. Fear of financial ruin. Fear of war. Fear of the unknown.

Around every imaginable corner, Fear lurks in the shadows, planning to poison your inner peace and outward poise. Being a bully, it relies on scare tactics and surprise attacks. It watches for your vulnerable moments, then picks the lock that safeguards your heart. As Fear invades, it reduces your spiritual muscles to a mass of mental mush. The prognosis, once you're infected, is neither bright nor cheery.

David's twenty-seventh psalm scratches the fearful where we itch. With broad, bold

strokes of his pen, the monarch of Israel puts iron in our bones. He meets Fear at the door of his home with two questions:

*Whom shall I fear?
Whom shall I dread?* (Psalm 27:1)

David slams that door in Fear's face with the declaration:

*My heart will not fear; . . .
In spite of this I shall be confident!* (27:3)

David then whistles and hums to himself as he walks back into the family room, kitchen, or master bedroom, reminding himself of the secrets of daily trust:

<i>I have asked from the LORD (27:4)</i>	PRAYER
<i>I behold the beauty of the LORD (27:4)</i>	VISION
<i>I meditate in His temple (27:4)</i>	GOD'S WORD
<i>In the day of trouble He will conceal me / hide me / lift me (27:5)</i>	GOD'S PROTECTION
<i>I will offer sacrifices and I will sing (27:6)</i>	MOMENT-BY- MOMENT WORSHIP
<i>I would have despaired unless I had believed . . . wait for the LORD (27:13–14)</i>	REST
<i>Let your heart take courage (27:14)</i>	DETERMINATION

Oh, how I needed these secrets that night in

the cockpit! Truth be told, I have needed them many nights and days before and since then. Maybe you have too. Maybe you need them right now.

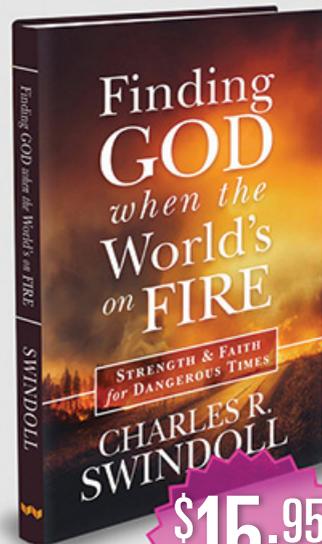
I'll share one more secret. Most of our fears, no matter their specific aim, boil down to one thing: fear of the future. Our gut churns with the thought: Who knows what may happen?

Am I describing you? Tell you what—let's share the same seat and relax for a change. Of course, you might want to fasten your seat belt. (It could get a little rough before we land.) But you can breathe easy. There's no need to fear the future.

God is already there . . . and He has never missed the runway through centuries of intimidating fog. ■



Charles R. Swindoll serves as the senior pastor-teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.



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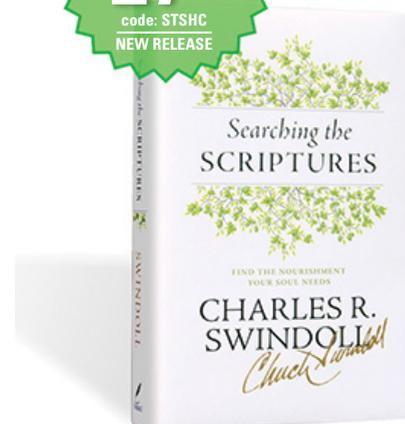
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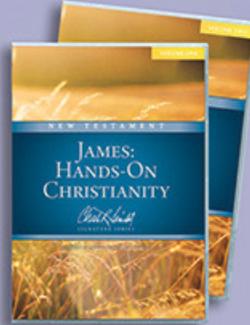
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