

THINGS THAT ENHANCE YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Focus on These Things

Philippians 4:8–9

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The work of ministry can be both exhilarating and rewarding as well as perilous. Consider the apostle Paul's testimony:

Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger? If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying. (2 Corinthians 11:23–31)

Based on Paul's witness, who would aspire to such work? The answer is anyone who has accepted Christ's call to serve! Chuck Swindoll encouraged graduate students at Dallas Theological Seminary to focus on six biblical virtues described by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians.

Quotable

*You reach a place
where your walk
with the Lord is
such that He's
the One who is so
magnificent that
all other faces and
reputations pale in
comparison to Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application





YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this two-part series, Chuck focuses on virtues worthy of any minister's meditation and focus. All Christians serve in some capacity whether vocationally or as lay ministers, so we all gain much from considering these powerful principles for ensuring a lifelong ministry of effectiveness and integrity.

Let's zoom in on Paul's message.



Observation: Reading Carefully

Patience and focus fuel observation. We need no extra resource or seminary degree to be a keen observer of the text. We just need to read it. Thoroughly. Repetitively. Reflectively. And *prayerfully*. That's what we'll do with *Philippians 4:8–9*. You may even read multiple translations. By the way, some of Chuck's favorites are the New Living Translation and the *New American Standard Bible*.

Here's our passage as rendered in the New Living Translation:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8–9)

In his message, Chuck referred to this passage as a helpful checklist for ministry—especially when discouragement sets in:

This is what I call an excellent checklist for ministry. Believe it or not, I go back to it frequently. Cynthia and I talk about it as much as we do any verses of Scripture. This sort of sums it up and helps us stay on target because, let's face it, there are days you will feel disappointed, underappreciated, and lacking in that enthusiasm I've been talking about. So you need to return to a checklist that will keep you on target. —Chuck Swindoll

Paul must have had a similar thought as he picked up his stylus to write these words to the believers at Philippi. Let's look closely at the passage.

To whom was Paul writing?



What did Paul urge his readers to do with their thoughts?

What was the promise Paul offered for doing so?



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 important words!

For each word listed, consult a commentary about its meaning, and write in your own words what you believe Paul intended. (HINT: You can go back and listen to Chuck's sermon, too, and draw your response from his explanation of each word!)

True

Honorable

Right, Just



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Pure

Lovely

Admirable

How does focusing our minds on these things lead to an effective life and ministry?

What was Paul's final exhortation to the Philippian believers (Philippians 4:9)?

What do you think he meant by "putting into practice" everything they had learned from him?



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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, actions, and instructions.

In Paul's letter to the believers in Rome, he gave a similar exhortation related to renewing their minds:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of the world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

How does Paul's exhortation to the Romans relate to his words in Philippians 4:8–9?

How does focusing our thoughts on worthy things transform the way we think and act?



Application: Making It Real to You

Application takes what you've discovered and makes it real in your own life and in the lives of others. So many people, even Christians, struggle to fend off negative thoughts about themselves, others, and the world around them. Paul's words in Philippians 4 provide a powerful antidote to counter such debilitating patterns.



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Write down three personal applications for your own life and ministry based on what you've learned in this study.

1.

2.

3.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are truth, and Your Son came full of grace and truth to set us free from the power of sin and death. Thank You for delivering me from the dark, debilitating patterns of my past and bringing me into the light of Your truth. Help me to focus on these things that You have revealed in Your gracious Word. For the praise and glory of Your name! Amen.



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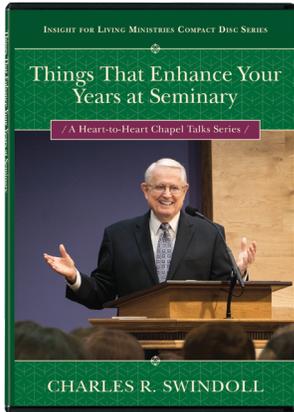
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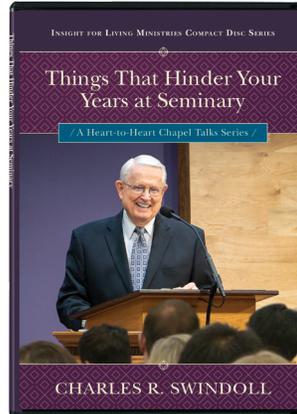
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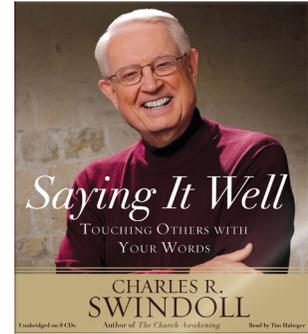
Tools for Digging Deeper



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



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