



LET'S BEGIN HERE

How precious is wise counsel when we need it most, during times of trouble. When the heat is on and the stakes are high, we so appreciate words of wisdom that correct our perspective, give us vital insight, and point us in the right direction. Anyone can see clearer in hindsight after the consequences of our actions are set in motion. But foresight—wisdom in advance—who can measure its value?

Joshua needed wise counsel when he and the vast nation he was leading came to the edge of the Promised Land at the banks of the Jordan River. His mentor and friend Moses had recently died. Absent on his shoulder was the weathered hand of the old prophet who had guided him all those years. In its place was the heavy burden of sole leadership and weighty concerns for his people.

Enemies awaited just ahead. And an even greater, invisible enemy lurked just behind: the mistakes of Israel's past. The danger of people repeating the sins of the wilderness must have weighed on Joshua's mind. He needed God's wise counsel more than ever, and so do we. The same invisible enemy that haunted the tents of the Hebrews stalks us as well. Let's find out what this enemy is and, using God's wise counsel to Joshua, learn how to put this enemy out of our lives.



DIGGING DEEPER

Israel's journey through the wilderness is a checkerboard of good and bad experiences. The apostle Paul traced the good and the bad in 1 Corinthians 10:1–12—which is an excellent background passage to Joshua's story. To better appreciate Paul's point in recounting Israel's wilderness years, let's take a minute to examine the Israelites' journey on a map of Egypt and Palestine.

Quotable

Overexposure to religious activities can lead to spiritual monotony. You can become weary in doing good. You can lose heart for spiritual things. You can lose your awe of God.

— Charles R. Swindoll





Searching the Scriptures Tip

Bible maps illustrate the regions where Bible characters lived, the topography, and the routes they took during their travels. Studying a Bible map helps you to step into the world in which the people lived and imagine yourself traveling alongside them.

You might wish to add an atlas to your Bible study library. A Bible atlas contains hundreds of detailed maps as well as fascinating historical background information. We recommend *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible*, which can be ordered through the Insight for Living Ministries online store.

If you don't have an atlas, find Israel's wilderness journey on a map in the back of your Bible. Locate the starting point of Israel's exodus and the location where the people camped before crossing the Jordan. Does your map indicate possible sites where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai? Try to find these locations. Then notice the region where the people wandered for forty years. Using the scale of miles on the map, estimate the distance between the starting point by the Nile and ending point by the Jordan.

What information do you glean about the conditions that the people endured, the distance traveled, and the contrasts in topography and climate during their forty-year journey?

Tragic Story of Spiritual Apathy

Now let's look at Paul's summary of the wilderness journey and the lesson he teaches.

I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10:1–5 NLT)



Notice the phrase, “all of them,” repeated five times. Use the select tool to highlight these phrases. Then, find the contrasting phrase, “most of them,” and highlight it as well. You can right-click on this phrase and change the color, if you wish, to make it stand out.

In the chart below, write down the blessings experienced by the Israelites as Paul lists them. Read the Old Testament account to understand the background of Paul’s reference. In the last row, write down what “most of them” experienced.

Phrase	Experience	Backstory
<i>All of them</i>		Exodus 13:21–22
<i>All of them</i>		Exodus 14:21–29
<i>All of them</i>		Exodus 14:31
<i>All of them</i>		Exodus 16:2–31
<i>All of them</i>		Exodus 17:1–7
<i>Most of them</i>		Numbers 14:20–23

Like a cool spring rain, the Lord showered blessings upon His needy people: guidance from the cloud, protection through the sea, sustenance through daily manna, and water from the rock. And yet God was not pleased with them. Why?

God intended the Israelites’ exodus, sojourn, and arrival at Canaan to illustrate His plan of *redemption*, which is God through Christ paying the price to rescue sinners and lead them to eternal life. God wanted His people to respond with trust and worship. Yet instead of a bouquet of devotion, a weedy infestation of grumbling grew out of the people’s hearts. Worse still, they shunned God and embraced idols.



Read 1 Corinthians 10:6–10. Note Paul’s explanation of what the Israelites did in each sin category, and then read the backstory in Exodus and Numbers.

Sin Category	Explanation	Backstory
<i>Idolatry</i>		Exodus 32:1–6
<i>Immorality</i>		Numbers 25:1–9
<i>Testing the Lord</i>		Numbers 21:4–6
<i>Grumbling</i>		Numbers 16:41–50

This is quite a list of sins! No wonder “God was not pleased” (1 Corinthians 10:5). Paul sums up the Israelites’ sin issue with a warning for his readers in verse 6: “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (NIV).

Paul was concerned that the Israelites’ shift of devotion from God to evil would take root in the Corinthian believers as well. What is Paul’s wise counsel? Don’t set your heart on evil things! Positively stated, *sustain your enthusiasm for God*.

Sustaining enthusiasm can be a challenge for people who beat the same spiritual path week after week. Overexposure to religious activities can harden our once-lush spiritual life, and we become bored, even cynical. So involved in the work of God, we lose our awe of God. This was the invisible enemy that attacked the Israelites: *spiritual monotony*. Boredom with God’s blessings led the Israelites into a spiritual wilderness more barren than any desert landscape.

Joshua must have wondered, *Would history repeat itself now that this new generation of Israelites had arrived at the Promised Land?* God’s wise counsel in the following four commands to Joshua helped the nation sustain enthusiasm and stay engaged with His calling, and obeying these commands will help us as well.



Four Commands to Sustain Enthusiasm

In Joshua 1:1–5, God first reissued His mission—namely, for the Israelites to take the land that was promised to Moses. Read these verses in Joshua, and look up the boundary locations on your Bible map.

To accomplish this mammoth mission, Joshua had to obey four commands. So vital was the first command, that God repeated it four times! Read it in Joshua 1:6–7, 9, and 18. What is it?

Find the second command in verse 7, and write it in the space below.

The third command is in verse 8. What is God exhorting in this verse?

And what do you find as God's final command in verse 9?



Bring It Home

How does obeying these four commands pump enthusiasm into our spiritual life? *Each one connects us to our God through faith.* We can only be strong and courageous when we trust in God's promises. We can only obey when we truly believe that God's way is best. We will only study His Word when we long to hear God's voice. We will only refrain from fear and discouragement when we are certain that God is with us.

If you're experiencing spiritual blahs, perhaps one of these areas of faith needs addressing. Search your soul, and ask yourself: *Am I trusting in God's promises? Do I believe God's way is best? Do I long to hear His voice through His Word? Am I certain that He is with me?*

Pick one of these questions to prompt reflection in the space below. Address this issue before God, and see Him boost your enthusiasm for spiritual things.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may I live my spiritual life by giving it my all, engaging my spiritual muscles, and acting with the strength and courage that only You can provide. Draw me closer to the fire of Your presence and kindle in me a heart that is set on You.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

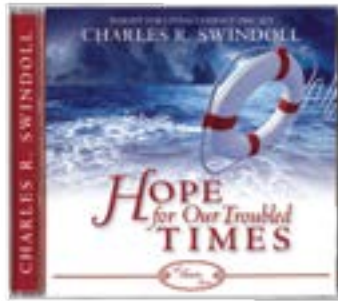
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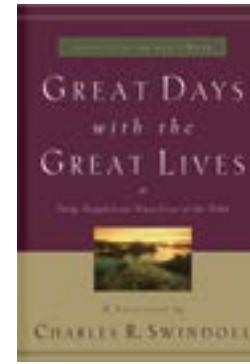
Tools for Digging Deeper



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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.



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