

\*This character study / commentary into Apostle Paul is based mostly on Charles Swindoll's "Great Lives in God's Word" series on Paul and FF Bruce's "Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free." Main source materials are based on contents in these books unless otherwise noted.

**Sunday July 2, 2023**

**Lesson 12: Swindoll's Insights on Paul's Second Missionary Journey**

**Reference: Acts 16:1-18:22; Swindoll Chapters 13, 14, 15**

**Supplemental: Lesson 9, 10, 11**

In our study lessons 9, 10, and 11, we covered Paul's second missionary journey chronologically starting in the year AD50. For this week's lesson, we will look at Swindoll's insights on Paul's second missionary journey as cited in his book on Apostle Paul; insights which he titled:

- Traveling as Paul Traveled (Chapter 13; cf Acts 15:36-18:22)
- Preaching as Paul Preached (Chapter 14; cf Acts 16-17)
- Leading as Paul Led (Chapter 15; cf Acts 18, 1 Thess 2:1-12)

### **Traveling as Paul Traveled**

In this chapter, Swindoll basically outline Paul's travel itinerary for not just the second missionary journey, but he also included highlights of his third journey. Swindoll's goal seems to be to try to put the readers in Paul's shoes as a missionary in Paul's time. Each stop has its own principles for us to embrace in ministry:

- Leaving Syrian Antioch for Lystra – here, Swindoll highlighted the change in Paul's missionary team from that with Barnabas to the recruiting of Timothy. Swindoll's emphasis here is on how God assembles His ministry teams.
- From Lystra to the Phrygian / Galatian Region – Swindoll's emphasis is to highlight how God sometimes says 'No' to our planned missionary goals; leading Paul's team towards Troas. When God says 'No' to our plans, we simply need to follow where He is leading us instead.
- From Troas into Philippi – Lessons into Philippi is to recognize how Paul is sensitive to the doors that are open and be at peace with the doors that have closed in ministry, no matter the circumstances.
- From Philippi to Thessalonica / Berea – Lessons from this leg of Paul's travels is to recognize that in ministry, we should not assume that critics in one place won't follow us to another.
- From Berea into Athens – Athens presented a unique experience in Paul's travel, given that Paul now finds himself alone in a city full of idols. Swindoll emphasizes on Paul's method of evangelism in this city, and dedicated his next chapter (preaching as Paul preached) to Paul's experience in Athens.
- From Athens to Corinth – Similar to Athens, the challenge in Corinth is about leadership and rest. On leadership, Swindoll focuses on Paul's interaction with the church in Thessalonica during this stay in Corinth, breaking down the leadership principles in chapter 15 (Leading as Paul Led). On rest, Swindoll highlights the friendship Paul made with Aquila and Priscilla.
- From Corinth to Ephesus – closing out Paul's second missionary journey, Swindoll simply noted how Paul was encouraged by the believers in that city as he makes his journey back towards Syrian Antioch.

Swindoll also covered briefly in this chapter on Paul's third journey, highlighting how despite his scars from Philippi, bruises from Lystra, and memories of the mob in Thessalonica, he still continues... starting his third journey as he approaches his age sixty years. Again, emphasis is on imagining traveling as Paul traveled in Paul's time – where there are no air-conditioned cars, no comfortable lodging, no choice of nice amenities, while walking on rugged roads or riding on uncomfortable wooden wheel carts and enduring extreme weather conditions; with no health care, and having to ration food for the journey.

Given these conditions, would you sign up to join Paul for this journey?

### **Preaching as Paul Preached**

This chapter is dedicated to show how Paul shared the message of the Gospel to the various stops in his travels. The book of Acts highlights these stops and mentions how Paul preached or reasoned with the Jews or God fearing Gentiles in the synagogues and other places without hesitation or apology. However, not until Acts 17 do we get a glimpse of how Paul actually preached or reasoned.

Breaking down Paul's encounter in Athens, Swindoll offered this "simple model" to evangelize from preparation to delivery:

1. The preparation – Swindoll noted how Paul was provoked by the Holy Spirit to as he wanders in this the city full of idols. This led him down the path to observe the scenery while engaging in thoughtful exercise of interrogation and interaction with the Athenians about their culture and belief. Doing so allowed Paul to "connect" with the people in the city when he preached.
2. The People – Paul engaged the people in a series of town-hall style discussions, reasoning with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, and in doing so, was able to gather information soon to become the stuff of his preaching. Swindoll also noted that Paul did not care – nor was he picky about – his audience; noting how "effective preachers don't care who is listening. Their aim is to win a hearing with people, then help them interact with the truth"
3. The Platform – Paul's actions in Athens indicated that he really did not care to have a pulpit to preach. The platform mattered little to him, as all he desired was an audience. As he continued to simply share the message with any audience, his platform naturally grew, opening the door into the Areopagus. This only happened because Paul didn't care for the size of his audience. He preached to one, he preaches to many.
4. The Proclamation – Paul begins with the people, opening his message on Mars Hill with "Men of Athens...." Any good preacher always begins where the people are, and lead them towards where they need to be. Swindoll noted that the reason Paul could speak to the people as he did was because he felt what he felt, and saw what he saw. Good preaching starts with the familiar, then builds bridges to where folks need to be. Paul went from "AN UNKNOWN GOD", which is where the people were, to the One True God, which is where the people need to be.
5. The Proposition – Paul ends his message with a call for action (altar call), which is the call to repent (Acts 17:30-31). Paul boldly proposed that the God of heaven expects a heartfelt response from the ones He had lovingly created. Evangelism without a call for action is effectively a meaningless message.

Additionally, Paul's message also included a component that many in that culture rejected, which is the topic on resurrection (Acts 17:32). That proposition led many to sneer at Paul's message. The principle observed by Swindoll in this episode is to recognize that every effective sermon will result in some sneering and rejecting. The Word of God is not easy for some people to accept. When we preached the Gospel message, we are aiming at three categories of people: those who reject truth, intrigued by truth, or believe the truth.

Swindoll closes the chapter by offering his four-part plan for powerful preaching:

1. Always stay on the subject, which is Christ – preaching that does not exalt Christ is empty preaching.
2. Always speak the truth without fear – don't be impressed with your audience's background or stature. In preaching, our primary responsibility is to be unintimidated and speak the truth.
3. Always start where the audience is – effective preaching always connects with the audience. Preacher should know the audience.
4. Always surrender the results to God – Once the people hear the message, our job ends. Our task is to simply communicate the truth, not to bring about conviction – that's the Spirit's job.

### Leading as Paul Led

During Paul's extended stay in Corinth, he learned about some trouble in Thessalonica, which compelled him to write a personal letter to encourage that flock and defend his apostolic authority. From the contents of that letter, Swindoll observed eight essential leadership qualities of Apostle Paul (cf 1 Thess 2:1-12) – four of which focuses on what leaders ought NOT to be, and four others on what leaders ought to be:

- Spiritual leaders are NOT deceptive (1 Thess 2:3) – there was nothing manipulative or devious or sleazy about the way Paul led. The supreme quality of a leader is unquestionable integrity.
- Good leaders are NOT people pleasers (1 Thess 2:4) – a sign of personal insecurity is wanting to be liked by everyone and remaining neutral for fear of offending others. Not being offensive to others is a sound principle, but not at the expense of offending God. Spiritual leaders focus on pleasing God, not men.
- Spiritual leaders are NOT greedy (1 Thess 2:5) – greed is not always about money; we can be greedy for power or desire. We can be greedy for our own agenda. Greed can be a hidden motive that causes us to orchestrate events to move in our direction. Greed flows out of discontentment. Actions spawned by greed usually cause more heartache and pain for everyone involved.
- Spiritual leaders are NOT self-serving (1 Thess 2:5-7) – Paul could have asserted his authority as an apostle, but he didn't. One of the marks of genuine humility is the restraint of power. There is nothing attractive about leaders who make people think they are important or powerful because of their title, as this counters the servant leadership model that spiritual leaders are to embrace. True spiritual leaders do not seek praise from men about their authoritative position.
- Good leaders ARE sensitive to the needs of others (1 Thess 2:7-8) – Paul compared his ministry to that of a mother who cares for her children. Good spiritual leaders cultivate a spirit of gentleness, showing great empathy and understanding in relating to those they lead.
- Good leaders HAVE affection for people (1 Thess 2:8-9) – Paul did not shrink from sharing his love for the people in the church in Thessalonica. Affection for people can be demonstrated in two ways: small yet frequent acts of kindness, and stated / written words of appreciation. Leadership is not about being someone's "boss." Relationship is key. Good leaders enjoy people and being with people, cultivating relationships with those they lead.
- Good leaders DEMONSTRATE authenticity (1 Thess 2:8) – Paul reminded the believers that he gave them himself. Simply delivering the truth does not make us a leader – as a computer commentary can do that just the same. Good leadership is about being authentic, being with the people we lead – in addition to delivering the truth.
- Good leaders ARE enthusiastically affirming (1 Thess 2:10-12) – combining this principle with the principle of being sensitive to the needs of others, good spiritual leaders balance the tender nurturing of a mother with the loving affirmation of a father through the act(s) of encouragement. Encouragement brings needed refreshment to weary individuals. It motivates people to better living (1 Thess 2:12).

Swindoll closes this chapter by offering a thought exercise for his readers, asking "Where did Paul learn how to lead like that?" What happened to the proud, self-sufficient Paul? Swindoll offered... the same thing that happened to Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Peter, John, Mary, Martha, Cornelius, Lydia (and others), which is that, he met the Master. Swindoll also closes the chapter by quoting the words of Hans Finzel, "Servant leaders must be willing to live filled with submission on many levels: submission to authority, submission to God the Father, submission to one's spouse, submission to the principles of wise living, and submission to one's obligation. Though conventional wisdom says everyone should submit to their leaders, the real truth is that leaders, to be effective, must learn to submit."

### Reflecting Upon the Word

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. This is the portion of the letter where Swindoll observed Paul's leadership principles.

1. Reflect on the principles of leadership that Swindoll on the previous page. How does this inform us about the leadership fallacies of that society?
2. Refer to Lesson 11 of our study series, where we highlighted the city officials governing Thessalonica. How does this inform us about the culture that influence leadership styles in that city?
3. Sound leadership qualities can lead to strong influential outcomes. What was Paul's goal with his sound leadership practices?

### Reflecting Upon our World

There are many leadership books written in our world today that highlight both generalized leadership principles as well as targeted leadership qualities.

1. What are some of the leadership principles or qualities advocated by today's leadership gurus in our world?
2. How much of these qualities applies to our church or ministry setting? Are there any principles or qualities advocated in our world that should not be brought into a church or ministry setting?
3. Paul tries to influence the believers to live lives worthy of God. Are there any leadership qualities that the world advocates that would go against this goal? Try to break down the worldly leadership principles and qualities you are familiar with into the Do's and Don'ts list as Swindoll has done in the previous page.

### Reflecting Upon Your Spiritual Journey

1. Recount the last time God had put you in a position to lead. How did you respond to that opportunity? Did you embrace it, or did you retreat? Did you encounter any situation where you wished you can have a do-over? Try to journal that experience and reflect on your encounters with God.
2. Reflect on various spiritual leaders that you have come across in your life journey, and assess them according to the Do's and Don'ts that Swindoll identified from Paul's life in Thessalonica. This is not an exercise of judgment, but rather an exercise to look for / recognize leadership qualities in people who are in positions of leadership. This exercise can help you react better should God place an up-and-coming young leader before you, who may be looking to you for mentorship or guidance.
3. Reflect on your own leadership journey, and compare your journey with the Do's and Don'ts that Swindoll identified from Paul's life in Thessalonica. Journal your reflection with any needed action items for your daily devotional exercises.