

THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY ONE

Grace: It's Really Amazing!

John 1:11–17; 8:30–32, 36

This series on grace can transform your attitude, improve your relationships, change your view of God, and enlarge your concept of the Christian life.

—Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS never intended the Christian life to become drudgery, predictable, or laden with a litany of rules. That was the religion of the Pharisees, who, with their nitpicking ways, managed to squash all the joy out of life. They shackled people with detailed regulations to govern every conceivable situation and forced people to live on a religious treadmill doing works and following rituals that were never enough to please God.

The Pharisees viewed God as petty and demanding. Their worldview was restrictive and narrow; their expectations, extreme; their mind-set, negative. Any behavior not up to their standard was met with a grimace and a scowl. Their faces shouted *No!* even before the word formed on their lips.

The welcoming face of Jesus, however, always beamed *Yes!* With delight, He invited people into the kingdom of God—the kind of life God intended for us under His rule. Life in God's kingdom is worshipful, creative, spontaneous, loving, and full of the joy that filled Jesus Himself (John 17:13).

Today's "Pharisees," or legalists, still enslave people. But Jesus sets us free to live in a loving relationship with God and others. The way of the modern-day Pharisee is *condemnation*—conform to the standard or be shunned. But the way of Christ is *transformation*—change on the inside and become like the Master.

Legalists may force external compliance to a standard, but only Jesus has the power through the Holy Spirit to make us new and draw us to His way of living. How does God raise us to new life in Christ? How does He rouse love in cold hearts? He transforms us with His grace. He gives us a *grace awakening!*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Grace: It's Really Amazing!

John 1:11–17; 8:30–32, 36



PREPARE YOUR HEART

This series on grace is an invitation to freedom. Lately, you may have been feeling as though you're:

- Imprisoned behind thick bars of petty concerns and critical opinions
- Locked in a cage of duties and demands, viewing only failure in yourself and others
- Confined to a rule-following, survival mind-set that lacks true satisfaction

If so, take hope. By receiving and responding to grace through Jesus, God's Spirit can *change your attitude* from negative to positive, *improve your relationships* as you become less intolerant and controlling and more joyful and accepting, and *alter your perspective of God* from fearful and guilt-ridden to vulnerable and secure.

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. Use the following space to write down areas of your life in which you want to invite God's Spirit of grace to awaken and free you.

Now, let's open God's Word and acquire insight from the apostle John, a hopeful promise from Jesus, and a warning from the apostle Paul.



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read the following verses from the New Living Translation. As you read, highlight with your cursor or circle key words or phrases in each of the passages. Underline words that repeat. Note contrasts by drawing a line between the contrasting words (for example, *slave* and *son* in John 8:34–36).

John's Insight into the Nature of Jesus

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. . . . From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:14, 16–17)

Jesus' Promise of Freedom

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." . . . Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free." (John 8:31–32, 34–36)

Paul's Warning about Grace-Killers

So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. (Galatians 5:1)

Let's dig a little deeper into these verses by using our skills of observation.



Observation: Urgent Words from John, Jesus, and Paul

In his book on which these studies are based, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll writes that observation is "the process of seeing what the Bible actually says. You're not answering questions at this point. You're not adding something through your imagination. You're simply reading the words on the page."¹ Observe carefully the verses you just read to answer the following questions.



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At a point in time, Jesus, who existed as “the Word” before time began (John 1:1), “became human” (1:14). According to John 1:14, 16–17, what did Jesus do as a human? What can we receive from Him?

According to the New American Standard Bible, Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (1:14 NASB). What does the NASB translation say we receive from Jesus (1:16)? How does what we receive from Jesus contrast with what the Jews received from Moses (1:17)?

John’s insight was this: *Moses gave the law, but Jesus gave so much more.* In fact, the law of Moses pointed people to two aspects of Jesus’ divine nature that only Jesus could offer: *grace* and *truth*.

Now let’s move on to John 8:31–32 and 8:34–36. What is the contrast between the results of sin and the results of Jesus’ truth?

What promise did Jesus give His followers?



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So, in summary, *Jesus gives us grace and truth, and His truth sets us free*. Paul brought this same message to the Galatian Christians. “For no one,” Paul declared, “will ever be made right with God by obeying the law” (Galatians 2:16). Once saved by grace, they could follow Christ’s teaching to love God and others through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, legalistic leaders killed the grace message of the gospel. They taught that the Galatians must observe all the rituals of the Mosaic law to be right with God. What was Paul’s warning in Galatians 5:1?



Interpretation: Understanding Grace and Its Implications

Interpretation is discovering the meaning of a passage. In this case, let’s weave into truth statements the three sections of Scripture we’ve studied. Below, summarize what you’ve learned about grace from John, Jesus, and Paul.



Correlation: Case Study of Grace in Action

Rather than define *grace* in two-dimensional terms, the Bible paints portraits of grace that breathe life into the concept. Even the Hebrew term for grace conjures a vivid image. The word is *chen*, meaning “to bend or stoop.” The picture is of a superior showing kindness and favor by stooping to an inferior’s level.

Grace can be read between every line of every story Jesus told. From the Good Samaritan to the story of the Prodigal Son, grace rubs off the pages like newspaper ink. Offering a striking contrast between grace and law, the story of the woman caught in adultery reveals a unique encounter with Jesus as well as with the



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legalistic Pharisees. It is a heart-stirring illustration of the power of grace to free a sinner from both the sin that enslaves and the law that condemns. Read the story in John 8:1–11, and comment below on the principles you learn about transformation through grace.



Application: Practical Expectations

Jesus stepped into a world of grace-killing legalists, but their darkness could not extinguish His light. What can we expect when we invite Christ to shine the light of His grace in our lives?

- *We can expect to gain a new respect for God's gifts to us and others.* We gain a new appreciation for the gifts of salvation, joy, laughter, beauty, friendship, and the amazing release of forgiveness—both given to and received from others.
- *We can expect to spend less time and energy being critical and concerned about others' choices.* We learn to accept others just as Christ accepts them.
- *We can expect to become more tolerant and less judgmental.* Transformed by grace, we focus less on people's appearance and more on substance, less on externals and more on character.
- *We can expect to take a giant leap toward spiritual maturity.* When we receive grace, we want to show grace. We become more like Christ in how we love others.

Which of these expectations strikes you as a need in your life?

Share this need with someone who can pray for you as you learn more about grace and absorb it into your life.



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John 1:11–17; 8:30–32, 36



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I invite You to mold my heart as a potter molds clay and creates a vessel for good use. Sprinkle Your grace on me like warm rain. Remove from me the abrasive pebbles of sin that cut others. Smooth out my rough parts with Your gentle yet persistent hand. Shape me as You shaped clay at creation. Breathe on me, and bring me to life through the power of Your Spirit. In the name of Your Son, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 71.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY TWO

The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

In order for there to be a demonstration of grace, there must be an acknowledgment that I have nothing in myself to give back to God. I am dependent upon Christ to do for me what I cannot do for myself.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE most dangerous heresy is that we can merit God's favor through our efforts. On the surface, this lie appears valid. In our culture, we celebrate hard work and self-made success. We're proud to wear on our sleeves the stripes of a strong work ethic. As the saying goes, "God helps those who help themselves," right? So what's the error?

Slinking in the shadows of the self-effort heresy is *self-worship*—boasting in our works rather than trusting God's work on our behalf. Since God does all the work of our salvation through Christ, He should get all the glory.

The biblical account of the Tower of Babel illustrates how far people will go to take God's glory from Him. According to the biblical account, the people schemed,

"Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world." (Genesis 11:4)

The structure likely resembled an ancient Babylonian ziggurat—a cone-shaped tower with a spiral staircase leading to a zodiac-inscribed pinnacle designed to represent heaven. Note the emphasis on human effort, "Come, let's build," and self-glory, "This will make us famous." *The Living Bible* identifies this tower as the idol it was: "a proud, eternal monument to themselves" (11:4 TLB). God stopped the blasphemous project by confusing the people's languages and scattering them (11:5–9).



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The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

The heresy of human effort has tempted many people to erect towers of good works that come short of heaven. But to warn is not enough; we must also declare the truth we deny when we boast in our works, namely, God's sufficiency expressed through His saving grace.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Through prayer, we open our hands to receive God's truth from His Word like bread from heaven. Take a moment to pray for the following:

- Wisdom—the ability to see God's view of our salvation
- Insight—the ability to grasp the true meaning of saving grace
- Understanding—the ability to put grace into practice

Among the ancient ziggurats in Mesopotamia lived a man named Abraham, an idol worshiper who would become the archetype of grace. In the world's eyes, if ever there was a man who could have climbed his way to try to reach heaven, it was wealthy and respected Abraham. But as we'll read in Romans 4:1–5, God saved Abraham not by his works but through his faith.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read the following verses from the New Living Translation. As you read, highlight with your cursor or mark with a pen key words or phrases. Underline repeated words. Note contrasts by drawing a dotted line between the contrasting words (for example, *work* and *faith*), and draw a solid line between similar words (for example, *believed* and *faith*).



The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. (Romans 4:1–5)



Observation: Defending Truth

Use your skills of observation to look closer at these verses and find the answers to the following questions.

God's Work . . . Not Human Effort

What truth did Abraham discover about being made right with God?

Notice the words that describe the heresy of effort-based salvation: *good deeds*, *boast*, *work*, *wages*, and *earned*. What words describe the truth of God's method of salvation?

We work hard, and on payday we receive our wages. How hard must we work to earn salvation? We can't work hard enough! —Chuck Swindoll



The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

Free Gift . . . Not Earned Wage

In our earthly economy, employers reward work by giving wages; however, in heaven's economy, God rewards faith with a gift. What is the substance of God's gift? In other words, what did God credit to Abraham in response to his faith?

Jesus paid the final payment for sin. He did the work, so we receive the gift of salvation free.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Explaining Grace

When God forgives sinners, even though they don't deserve to be forgiven, He demonstrates grace. His means of extending His grace is *justification*. Commentator Donald Barnhouse explained justification using Abraham as an example.

The day came when, in the accounting of God, ungodly Abraham was suddenly declared righteous. There was nothing in Abraham that caused the action; it began in God and went out to the man in sovereign grace. Upon a sinner the righteousness of God was placed. In the accounting the very righteousness of God was reckoned, credited, and imputed. The Lord God Himself, by an act of grace moved by His sovereign love, stooped to the record and blotted out everything that was against Abraham, and then wrote down on the record that He, God, counted, reckoned, credited, imputed this man Abraham to be perfect even at a moment when Abraham was ungodly in himself. That is justification.¹

How might you explain *justification* to someone?



The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

According to Romans 5:1, what did Paul say is the result of our justification?

Our Condition

Note below what the following passages say about our condition before being made right with God.

Romans 5:12–14	Ephesians 2:1–3, 12



The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

God's Solution

What is God's solution to our hopeless condition?

Romans 5:18–19	Ephesians 2:4–9

While we were in bondage to our sin and shackled to our ways, grace came to the rescue. Grace was the key that unlocked our prison door and set us free. How did Paul describe grace, according to Romans 5:20?

In his message, Chuck Swindoll summed up grace's amazing power.

- Where sin overflowed, grace flooded in.
- Where sin measurably increased, grace immeasurably increased.
- Where sin was finite, grace was infinite.
- Where sin was colossal, grace was super-colossal!



The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13



Correlation: Case Study of Grace in Action

The thief on the cross is a classic example that God's grace is not based on human effort. Read the scene in Luke 23:39–43, and describe the events that occurred.

The thief couldn't have worked for his forgiveness even if he had tried. All he could do while he was hanging on that cross was believe. And in the final analysis, that's all we can do too. Like the thief on the cross, every human hangs under sentence of death, but there's hope in Christ!

By believing in Jesus we can have our sins forgiven and a secure home in heaven. Jesus made that promise to the thief on the cross, and He makes it to us as well. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Offering Hope

Many sincere people try to construct their own salvation. Brick by brick, they assemble their good works, hoping their tower will reach heaven but never certain it will. Thankfully, our hope rests on the strong back of Christ who lived a righteous life, bore our sin, rose from the grave, and will carry us to heaven. How did Paul explain our hope in this passage?

Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.
(Titus 3:3–7)

What hope do these verses offer you?



The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:1–13

In his message, Chuck Swindoll concluded with two principles worth remembering.

1. God doesn't merely pity you; He offers you kindness, mercy, and grace.
2. God not only will save you; He offers you His life.

How can you hold on to these truths in the coming days when you feel insecure?

Would you like to share these principles with someone who needs to hear them? Take this study on the road! Tell someone soon about God's amazing gift of salvation that can be theirs through faith in Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving to me all that I need and even an amount more than I could ever earn on my own. Your “superabundant” grace is much more than I deserve, and yet You offered it to me, like Abraham, the moment I believed. May Your name be uplifted today, and may You receive all the glory for ever and ever. Amen!

ENDNOTE

1. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Remedy; God's River*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 208.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY THREE

The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20

When we believe in Christ, His cleansing blood washes away our sins. We are placed into Christ and the righteousness of God is credited to our account.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THROUGHOUT history, God’s liberating song of grace has been calling people to freedom. In 1738, for example, Charles Wesley heard grace’s melody while reading Luther’s commentary on Galatians. For the first time, he understood salvation by faith in Christ alone, and he felt a peace that he had not found in his years of striving to please God. Three days later, Charles’ brother John experienced grace’s touch in a similar way. At a meeting, he listened to a reading from Luther’s preface to Romans that changed his life. John later wrote in his journal:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.¹

The joy of Charles and John’s “grace awakening” could not be contained. In the years that followed, the gospel of grace flowed out in torrents through the thousands of hymns Charles wrote and the countless sermons John preached. Wherever they traveled through Europe and America, the Wesleys, along with George Whitefield, spread the news of God’s grace and flamed a movement of spiritual revivals known as the Great Awakening.

The same grace awakening that gave roots to the Great Awakening still blooms today. In this study, we’ll examine how grace awakens our spirits through our salvation. Then we’ll start a journey that will take us through the rest of the series to understand how our grace-based salvation blossoms into a grace-based lifestyle, radically changing every aspect of our identity and relationships.



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The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to study grace's biblical roots, take a moment to pray for God's Spirit to illumine your mind and heart. As Chuck Swindoll advised,

“Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort.”²

You may wish to pray as Chuck prays before he studies the Word:

I often pray, “Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.”³



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Salvation by grace, based alone on the person and work of Jesus Christ, is the central truth of Christianity. The Bible offers no better example of grace-based salvation than the Patriarch Abraham.



Observation: Explaining the Gospel of Grace

As we discovered in the previous study, the apostle Paul made much of Abraham's example of faith—not religious works—as the means to receiving God's grace. Paul's faith-versus-works distinction in Romans 4:1–3 deserves another look:

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.”



The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20

In the previous study, we noted that our salvation is accomplished by God's work, not human effort, and it is a free gift, not an earned wage. Let's highlight the sentence, "Abraham believed God" (Romans 4:3). What specifically did Abraham believe? Read [Genesis 12:1–3](#), and write down the promises that Abraham believed God would fulfill.

By faith, Abraham traveled to the land God showed him. Yet, even though God gave Abraham a homeland and influence, Abraham's faith was truly tested when God delayed giving Abraham an heir. What was Abraham's solution to his and Sarah's infertility ([Genesis 15:1–3](#))?

What was God's answer? How did Abraham respond? What did God do ([15:4–6](#))?

God counting Abraham as righteous because of his faith was an act of grace. Faith is the key that unlocks the treasure of salvation, and, according to Paul, because anyone can have faith, the treasure is available to all. Read [Romans 4:16](#) and [4:22–25](#), and write down Paul's points about Abraham being the prototype for all of humanity.



The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20

What exactly did Paul mean when he wrote, “God *counted* [Abraham] as righteous because of his faith” (Romans 4:3, emphasis added)? For the answer, let’s begin the interpretation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study as we define *justification* and explore a theological principle called “positional truth.”



Interpretation: Understanding Our Position in Christ

A judge “counts” a person as righteous or innocent when he or she acquits or pardons a person convicted of a crime. God does something similar at our salvation. This judicial image is at the heart of the Greek word *dikaioo*, often translated “justify.” Read the following verses from the New American Standard Bible that include this word:

- *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.* (Romans 4:5)
- *He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.* (4:25)
- *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (5:1)

Who alone can justify, and what is the condition of those who are justified (4:5)?

What event in Jesus’ life made possible our justification (4:25)?



The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20

What must we do for justification to occur, and what is the result (Romans 5:1)?

“Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while still in a sinning state.” —Chuck Swindoll

We are like criminals who, having been convicted of multiple felonies, stand before a judge for sentencing. But with the bang of his gavel, the judge acquits us! How can he do that? How can a judge who justifies guilty people be just in doing so?

God pardons us not because we deserve to be pardoned. The basis of our justification is not our *condition*, which is sinner, but our *position*, which is “in Christ.” We were “in Adam” prior to faith (1 Corinthians 15:22 NASB), but Christ redeemed (or purchased) us by paying the price for our sin when He died for us on the cross.

The death of Christ provides the complete payment for your sins. All of us, sinful as we are, are covered by the blood of Christ. His cleansing blood washes away our sins, and then we are placed into Christ and credited to our account is the righteousness of God. —Chuck Swindoll

According to [Romans 8:1–2](#), from what are we freed because of our position in Christ Jesus?



The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20

Because of our grace-based salvation, we are free to live a new, grace-based life. Read what Paul said about this new life in Christ in The Message paraphrase of Galatians 2:19–21, and underline the phrases that illustrate the grace-based life.

What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a "law man" so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.

As he stated in Galatians 2:20, Paul lived by faith, and he was not going back to keeping the law to please God. Why? Having been justified by faith, he was free to serve God within the context of a secure relationship with God . . . and so are we!



Correlation: Determining to Stand Firm in Our Freedom

What characterizes a grace-based lifestyle? Freedom. What did Paul teach about people who wish to take away our freedom (*Galatians 2:4–5*)?

What must we do to sustain our freedom (*5:1*)?

Let's wrap up our study by looking at the fruit that results from a grace-based life.



The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20



Application: The Fruit That Grows from a Grace-Based Life

Like Abraham, we receive God's promise by faith. Because God justifies us by faith, not by our keeping the law, we are free from the law to experience the following fruit of a grace-based life:

- *Freedom from the control and domination of sin* (Romans 6:12–14)
Christ is our Lord, so sin need not control us because it is no longer our master.
- *Freedom from the demands and requirements of the law* (8:3–4)
Christ fulfilled the law, ending its authority to judge us.
- *Freedom from the grind and grip of death* (8:5–6, 37–39)
Death may touch us, but it cannot keep us. Our destiny is not the grave but life with Christ, and in Him we are secure.
- *Freedom from divine and human condemnation* (8:31–34)
Grace sets us free from the fear of judgment that those who work for their salvation dread.

Before Charles and John Wesley understood the gospel of grace, they feared God's condemnation and attempted to please God and people through religious rule-keeping. If you feel the same way, this may be your moment of faith in which you accept God's gift of salvation. Perhaps this prayer can help you express your heart's acceptance of grace.

Lord, I acknowledge that I am lost. I believe Jesus paid in full the penalty for my sin, and I believe in Him now. I take Jesus as my master, captain, and Savior. Thank You for redeeming me and declaring me righteous and accepted in Christ. Amen.

God not only saves you by His grace, He wants you to live in His grace. Use the following space to write your reflections on the four freedoms Chuck listed above and to express your desire to live in God's grace in every area of your life.

Through the remainder of this series, we'll discover the beauty of a life of grace with its freedom and amazing possibilities. What a journey it will be!



The Roots of a Grace Awakening

Romans 4:1–5; 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the only reason I can have peace with You is because of Your grace. By grace, You declare me righteous. By grace I'm saved, and in grace I live. Free me to experience Your power as I live each day dependent on You. In the name of Christ my Savior, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. A. Skevington Wood, "John and Charles Wesley and Methodism," *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, John D. Woodbridge, gen. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 291.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
3. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures*, 128.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY FOUR

Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

The Christian life creates an inevitable and inescapable tension. On the one hand there are the joyous benefits of being liberated and then there is the very real fact that we could live irresponsibly. Now that is the risk!

—Charles R. Swindoll

THERE once was a man selling quail in a bazaar in India. He attached strings to a stake and tied the other ends to little bands on the birds' legs so they could only walk in circles. A stranger felt sorry for the quail, so he bought the entire covey and set them free. Cut loose, the quail flew off . . . but they landed about twenty yards away and began walking in circles again!

These habit-loving quail illustrate one aspect of the risk of embracing grace. After learning that God saves us by faith and not by keeping the law, some people receive freedom only to return to law-keeping. Grace has set them free, but they keep walking in circles as though still tethered to the law.

Others, however, take their freedom to the opposite extreme. Without restraint, they go wild and indulge every sinful desire! They live by the libertarian's refrain: "Free from the law, oh happy condition. Sin all you please, for there is remission!"

Worried that people might turn their liberty into license to sin, some Christian leaders clip their parishioners' wings with these freedom-killing strategies:

- *Emphasize works over grace:* Denouncing what they view as "easy believe-ism," they add to faith-based salvation a certain level of commitment. Such teaching casts doubt on our faith because we never know if we're committed enough to be true Christians.
- *Give people lists of dos and don'ts:* You won't find these lists in the Bible. Their sole purpose is to keep people on a string.



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Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

- *Leave no room for gray areas:* Moral gray areas are matters about which the Bible neither prohibits nor permits but offers principles for guidance. Leaders who fear freedom teach only black and white, never allowing people to think for themselves.
- *Cultivate a judgmental attitude:* Their condemning scowl brings to earth anyone who dares to take flight on freedom's wings.

Grace is risky. People may take their freedom to extremes, but the solution isn't to stop living by grace. Rather, we must learn how to use our freedom as a pathway to maturity. In fact, the only way to grow up as Christians is to embrace grace, risks and all!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Balancing the extremes of freedom requires wisdom from God. In his epistle, James offered this promise: “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking” (James 1:5). Take a few moments and ask the Lord for wisdom as you study His Word, and He will certainly give it to you.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As we've learned, God offers salvation as a gift, no strings attached! We can't earn our salvation even if we try because even our best efforts fall short. Since no one can obey the law perfectly, Paul argued, “No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands” (Romans 3:20).

Because the law failed to make us righteous, God sent His Son to bear our judgment and redeem us. To receive salvation, we simply accept Christ by faith. “He makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus” (3:26). God's grace is truly amazing!



Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

Well, if it's true that we're purchased with Christ's blood and freed from the law, then we can sin all we want, right? Some who heard the message of grace in Paul's day also wondered about freedom's limits; read the two ways that they posed the same question to Paul:

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?
(Romans 6:1)

Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? (6:15)

Paul's answer was immediate and emphatic: "Of course not!" (6:2, 15). Let's use our observation skills to examine Paul's reasons for his response.



Observation: Resolving the Inescapable Tension

Paul built his response on three key words that form stepping stones across the swift river of sinful extremes.

Know Who We Are

Find the first key word, *know*, in [Romans 6:2–9](#). What theological truths about baptism did Paul teach (Romans 6:2–4)?

Based on these truths, what did Paul say we should know with certainty (6:5–9)?



Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

Consider Ourselves Dead to Sin

Find the second key word, *consider*, in [Romans 6:10–11](#). What was the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:10)?

What was Paul's conclusion (6:11)?

Present Ourselves to Our New Master

Find the third key word, *present*, in [Romans 6:12–14 \(NASB\)](#). What were Paul's negative and positive commands (Romans 6:12–14)?

According to Paul, using our freedom to indulge our desires enslaves us to sin—the worst sort of master. Instead of freeing us to sin, *grace frees us to obey God*—the finest Master.

The whole message of grace is not about sinning and sinning all the more because grace abounds all the more. It is a message that frees you and me from the domination of sin and the authority of men and women over you and brings you in league with the teaching of Christ and a message that frees you to obey Him and to grow up in Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

In a later study, “If You’re Free, Why Not Live Like It?” we’ll take a more in-depth look at the specifics of how Paul’s strategy of *know*, *consider*, and *present* works. For now, let’s move into the interpretation phase of our study as we seek to understand the *meaning* of our freedom in Christ.



Interpretation: Finding the Benefits and Balance of Freedom

The risk of grace is that we might use our freedom either to return to law-keeping (legalism) or to indulge in sin (license). But God didn’t unshackle us from the law only for us to shackle ourselves to the law or sin. Either way, we’re in bondage! How much better it is to enjoy the benefits of freedom. Paul made this point in Galatians 5:1 and 13.

So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law. (Galatians 5:1)

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. (5:13)

According to these verses, why did Christ set us free?

Write your own definition of *freedom* based on these verses.



Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

Benefits of Freedom

In his message, Chuck Swindoll listed four benefits of freedom:

- *We're no longer helplessly bound to our impulses.* We have the freedom *and* power to reject sin.
- *We're free to make our own choices.* We can ask the Holy Spirit to direct us so we don't feel bound by what others think we should do.
- *We can avoid the tyranny of comparison.* We need only be concerned with pleasing God, not measuring up to others.
- *We grow up!* We become the person God wants us to be, not the person someone else thinks we should be.

Balance of Freedom

Just as a tightrope walker's pole helps prevent him or her from falling, the principle Paul offered in Galatians 5:13 can balance us as we maneuver grace's thin wire: "Use your freedom to serve one another in love."

Lack of love is the primary characteristic of believers who use their freedom irresponsibly. They have little concern for others, and when they hurt others, they tend to rationalize their actions and refuse accountability. How do you think love balances our freedom?



Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14



Correlation: Obeying the Law of Love

Paul stated that although he was free from the Mosaic law, he was obligated to obey another law. What law was that (*John 15:12; 1 Corinthians 9:20–21*)?

Although some might take the message of grace to extremes, the risk is worth the reward of living with freedom to love others!



Application: Suggestions for Living Freely and Responsibly

God frees us not to do whatever we want but to become the people He created us to be! Consequently, *enjoy the freedom grace provides*. Your liberty is a gift from God. *Consider grace a privilege rather than a right*. Be grateful for the freedom God offers and don't flaunt it. *Remember that our freedom cost the Savior His life*. Something so precious should never be taken for granted.

As you live in freedom, Chuck offers three questions to ask yourself so that you can live both freely and responsibly.

1. *Is this wise?* Not everything we're free to do is wise when we're following the principles of God's Word.
2. *Do I have peace?* If the Holy Spirit is needling your conscience and making you feel uneasy, refrain from the action.
3. *Does it show proper respect?* Christ's law of love is the ultimate guiding principle. Always do the most loving thing.

Cast these questions as beams of light against a certain situation in your life. How do they offer you guidance?



Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

Christ sets us free because He knows rules don't grow us like freedom does. Love is the rudder that keeps our ship of freedom on a steady course. Only in freedom can we learn to love others genuinely, just as our Father does.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, guard me from the extremes of legalism and license. Bring me into balance as I follow Your way of love. Thank You for providing me a life like no other, an abundant life. May I claim and enjoy the life You have for me through Christ, in whose name I pray, amen.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY FIVE

Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

If God is satisfied with His Son's death for sin, and we are by faith through grace in God's Son, then God is satisfied with us! When will we ever believe that?

—Charles R. Swindoll

GRACE . . . how magnificent, how marvelous! Like a rainbow breaking through storm clouds and arching across the sky, grace encompasses our lives from horizon to horizon, from our first breath to our last . . . and throughout eternity!

Think of the many colors of grace's rainbow. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, we have received blessings upon blessings, all unmerited and undeserved (Ephesians 1:3–8).

- *Atonement*—God paid our debt of sin.
- *Salvation*—God delivered us from judgment.
- *Justification*—God declared us righteous.
- *Redemption*—God bought and freed us from enslavement to sin.
- *Reconciliation*—God restored us to a relationship with Himself.



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Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

And more! When we placed our faith in Jesus, God united us with His Son and adopted us as His own. “Because we are his children,” Paul declared,

God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.
(Galatians 4:6–7)

By grace, God not only forgave our sins, He welcomed us into His family and made us heirs with His Son. He slipped on our finger a ring that shows we belong to Him and have a place at His banquet table—accepted, secure, and loved!

One of the greatest examples of grace in Scripture is in the account of a man who, although undeserving like us, was given a seat at a king’s banquet table. His name is one we would never have known if it had not been for grace: Mephibosheth.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sometimes God’s rainbow of grace is obscured by clouds of legalism and the impossible demands of others. In the space below, tell the Lord about the pressure you may feel trying to live up to others’ expectations. Pray that God will open your eyes to all the hues of His grace reflected in this study.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Mephibosheth’s story can be traced to a vow that David made to Jonathan, Mephibosheth’s father. It was during the days when Jonathan’s father, King Saul, was trying to kill David because God had chosen David to become the next king. What was Jonathan’s vow, and how did David respond (*1 Samuel 20:12–17*)?



Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

For years, David was a fugitive on the run until Saul was killed during a battle with the Philistines. Tragically, Jonathan was killed too. In the frantic aftermath, every family member related to Saul fled for their lives, and young Mephibosheth was injured. What happened to five-year-old Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 4:4)?

Saul's dynasty came to an end two years later when Saul's son, Ishbosheth, was murdered by his own captains (4:1–8). Finally, at age 30, David was declared the rightful king of Israel (5:4). He moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem, which became known as the City of David (5:6–10). After some time passed, he remembered his vow to Jonathan.



Observation: Considering an Example of Grace

Read 2 Samuel 9:1–13. Use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of observation to notice the progression of the passage from David's question, to his search, and to his provision of grace. Also, notice key phrases that reveal David's heart of grace.

A Question Asked—2 Samuel 9:1–4

The first task for most kings in David's day was to eliminate the previous king's remaining heirs who might threaten the new king's rule. What strikes you by contrast as you read David's question (2 Samuel 9:1)?



Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

The Hebrew word for “kindness,” *chesed*, has rich theological meaning. What does Isaiah’s prophecy in [Isaiah 54:8–9](#) reveal about the *chesed* of God, translated in the New Living Translation as “everlasting love” and “faithful love?”

David’s question led him to an old servant in Saul’s household named Ziba. What did Ziba tell David ([2 Samuel 9:2–4](#))? Write down the meaning of the town name *Lo-debar* from the online version of *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*. What does the name suggest about the lifeless condition in which Mephibosheth was living?

A Man Sought—2 Samuel 9:5–6

What happened when David sent for Mephibosheth ([2 Samuel 9:5–6](#))? Based on the history of hostility of kings toward former kings’ heirs, what might Mephibosheth have assumed about David’s intentions?



Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

A Privilege Provided—2 Samuel 9:7–13

David didn't summon Mephibosheth to kill him but to show him *chesed*. What gestures of kindness did David shower upon Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:7–13)?

From his barren place of exile, Lo-debar, where conditions were harsh and food was scarce, Mephibosheth was ushered into a place of plenty with servants to tend his needs. David even welcomed Mephibosheth to his family table, making him equal in status to his own children. What grace!



Interpretation: Seeing the Analogies of Grace

Mephibosheth did not earn David's favor through personal merit, and neither could he offer anything in exchange for David's generosity. If Mephibosheth had, it would not have been grace! Grace is acceptance without reservation, forgiveness without condemnation, pardon without probation. It is unconditional, unrestrained love from the giver to the receiver.

As we compare Mephibosheth's grace encounter with David to our relationship with the Son of David, Jesus Christ, we find deeper layers of meaning for us today. According to Chuck Swindoll, there are at least eight analogies between the grace that David showed Mephibosheth and the grace that God has extended to us through Christ. Read the verses in the right column of the following chart, then fill in the theological analogy. We filled in the first one as an example.



Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

The Account David's Grace toward Mephibosheth	The Theological Analogy God's Grace toward Us
Mephibosheth was Jonathan's son, born in his image.	Genesis 1:27 Humans were created as God's children in His image.
Mephibosheth suffered a fall that crippled him for life.	Romans 5:12
David sought someone to whom he might extend grace.	Luke 19:10
Undeserving Mephibosheth couldn't earn the king's favor but simply receive it.	John 1:12
David took Mephibosheth from a barren place to the royal banquet table.	Revelation 19:9
David gave Mephibosheth the same royal status as his own children.	Ephesians 1:5
Mephibosheth's disability was a constant reminder of David's grace.	2 Corinthians 12:9
David gave Mephibosheth the same privileges as his own sons and daughters.	Galatians 4:4–7

Out of his love for Jonathan, David sought anyone to whom he might extend grace. God also, because of His love for His Son and acceptance of His atoning death on the cross, continues to seek anyone to whom He might extend His grace. What should be our response to grace? The apostle Paul modeled how to respond.



Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13



Correlation: The Life-changing Power of Grace

Like Mephibosheth, Paul received grace with humility, and his life was dramatically transformed. Read Paul's own words of how grace changed him, and write down what you learn from his example (1 Corinthians 15:9–10).



Application: Suggestions for Living Freely and Responsibly

In his message, Chuck described a woman who could never please her demanding boss. She spent long hours striving for his approval until, finally, he tersely mumbled, “Well done,” and walked away. He couldn't even look her in the eyes. What was her response after a year of living under her supervisor's gloomy, graceless attitude? Rebellion.

In contrast, David showed unconditional love toward Mephibosheth. David could have refused to show mercy to the heir of Saul's kingdom. Instead, David showered grace upon Mephibosheth, and the undeserving man remained loyal to the king for life.

Likewise, Paul's response to grace was lifelong devotion to Christ and determination to show grace to others. Paul's credo could have been stated in three sentences:

- God does what He does by grace.
- I am what I am by the grace of God.
- I let others be what they are by the grace of God.



Undeserving, Yet Unconditionally Loved

2 Samuel 9:1–13

God's grace can transform your life too. Think back to your opening prayer. Has God opened your eyes to all the hues of His grace that overarch your life? What has He revealed to you about His unconditional love for you through Christ? (Remember Chuck's eight analogies.)

Have you had an experience like the woman with the graceless boss? What was it like, and what did you learn?

How may God be leading you to shower grace upon those you know and show kindness to the "Mephibosheths" in your life? How can you make Paul's "credo" your own?

When we sit at that royal banquet table in heaven, we will have so much to be thankful for. And all the praise will go to the Lord Jesus, whose face shines with grace!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your open arms inviting me to Your banquet table. Thank You for taking away my blindness when I trusted in Your Son for forgiving me. You have drawn me to Yourself through Your unconditional love and covered my life from beginning to end with the beautiful blessings of grace. I give You my heart and lift my voice in eternal praise through Jesus Christ, my Lord, amen.



THE GRACE AWAKENING

STUDY SIX

Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Why is it that, while we believe strongly in liberty for our country, so many Christians do not believe as strongly in freedom for their faith and yield to those who wish to take it away? Stand your ground for grace!

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN Christ set us free, He removed from our necks the oppressive yoke of the law and replaced it with His easy yoke (Matthew 11:28–30). He liberated us from the taskmaster of sin and released us from the burdens of guilt and shame. Because Christ defeated sin’s power through His death and resurrection, our freedom is certain. “If the Son sets you free, you are truly free” (John 8:36)!

However, we must never take for granted our freedom. We must keep a vigilant lookout for grace-killing heresy that can eclipse Christ’s message of freedom. As Paul warned church members in Galatia, legalists will sneak in and “deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ” (Galatians 1:7). Their joyless and intimidating teaching will take captive some Christians, putting them once again under the yoke of the law. Sadly, believers in bondage lose their joy and often become uptight, inflexible, inhibited, overly cautious, and obsessively fearful about what others think or say.

How can we, as Paul urged, “make sure that [we] stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law” (5:1)? In this study, we’ll learn to stand our ground against legalism by defining two significant *terms*, identifying three powerful *adversaries*, and specifying four strong *defenses*.



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Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The two significant terms are *liberty* and *legalism*. Use the following definitions from Chuck Swindoll's book *The Grace Awakening* as prompts to pray for an area of your life in which you want God to help you experience more liberty and less legalism.

Liberty

Liberty is freedom from slavery or bondage. It is initially freedom from sin's power and guilt. Freedom from God's wrath. Freedom from satanic and demonic authority. And equally important, it is freedom from shame that could easily bind me, as well as freedom from the tyranny of others' opinions, obligations, and expectations. . . .

Such freedom is motivated . . . by unconditional love. When the grace of Christ is fully awake in your life, you find you're no longer doing something due to fear or out of shame or because of guilt, but you're doing it through love. The dreadful tyranny of performing in order to please someone is over . . . forever.

Grace also brings a freedom *to do* something else. . . . It's freedom to experience and enjoy a new kind of power that only Christ could bring. It is a freedom to become all that He meant me to be, *regardless of how He leads others*. I can be me—fully and freely. It is a freedom to know Him in an independent and personal way. And that freedom is then released to others so they can be who they are meant to be—different from me!¹

Chuck wraps up his thoughts on liberty with these words:

This freedom to be who we are is nothing short of magnificent. It is freedom to make choices, freedom to know His will, freedom to walk in it, freedom to obey His leading me in my life and you in your life. Once you've tasted such freedom, nothing else satisfies.²

Living in liberty sounds wonderful, doesn't it! Based on Chuck's description, into what new realms of liberty do you pray the Lord will *guide* you?



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Legalism

Next, Chuck explains legalism.

Legalism is an attitude, a mentality based on pride. It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself. A legalist assumes the place of authority and pushes it to unwarranted extremes. . . .

Legalism is rigid, grim, exacting, and lawlike in nature. Pride, which is at the heart of legalism, works in sync with other motivating factors. Like guilt. And fear. And shame. It leads to an emphasis on what [one] should *not* be and what one should *not* do. It flourishes in a drab context of negativism.³

What strikes you from this quote as aspects of legalism from which you pray the Lord will *guard* you?



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

With liberty and legalism clearly in view, let's identify from Paul's epistle to the Galatians three powerful *adversaries* that steal our freedom.



Observation: The Adversary of Heresy—Galatians 1:6–10

Paul founded the Galatian church on the central truth of the gospel: salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. After Paul moved on to the next city in his missionary journey, Jewish false teachers moved in and convinced the Gentile converts that faith in Christ was not enough. These legalists taught that God only accepts Gentiles who follow the law of Moses and are circumcised (Acts 15:5; Galatians 6:12–13).

Under Paul's leadership, the church had boarded Christ's train of grace headed toward freedom, but the false teachers hijacked the church and reversed course. They were leading the people from grace back to law, from the new covenant back to the old covenant, from Jesus back to Moses!



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of observation as you read *Galatians 1:6–10*, and identify the first of three types of adversaries that Paul exposed in Galatia and we still encounter today.

How did Paul describe the legalists (Galatians 1:7)?

The New American Standard Bible's word-for-word translation of Galatians 1:6–7 more clearly communicates Paul's use of two contrasting Greek words—*heteros* and *allos*. Although both Greek words can be translated, “another,” *heteros* implies “another of a different kind” while *allos* means “another of the same kind.” The false teachers may have claimed their “gospel” was simply *allos*, another of the same kind as Paul's. However, Paul told the Galatians that they were following “a different [*heteros*] gospel; which is really not another [*allos*]” (1:6–7 NASB).

What point did Paul drive home by contrasting *heteros* with *allos*?

The legalists were “disturbing” people, intending to “distort the gospel of Christ” (1:7 NASB). Those who spread heresies double their damage; they trouble people's souls and twist Christ's truth! In this case, they cast doubt on the sufficiency of the cross and undermined the people's confidence in the Savior.

What was so treacherous about this heresy that angered Paul to the point that he called down curses on the legalists, not caring one whit about pleasing them (1:8–10)?



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Not only do legalists disturb and distort by teaching heresy, they also harass people through the tactics Paul described in our next passage.



Interpretation: The Adversary of Harassment—Galatians 2:1–6

Read *Galatians 2:1–6*. In this passage, Paul recalled a meeting of the church leaders in Jerusalem. He brought with him to this meeting Barnabas, a circumcised Jew, who was well-known and respected in the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:36–37). He also brought Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, who represented the scores of Gentiles turning from idol worship to follow Jesus (Galatians 2:1).

When Paul met privately with “those considered to be leaders of the church,” what did he share with them and why (2:2)?

What were the results of Paul’s meeting with the heads of the church (2:3)?

A critical step in the interpretation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method is understanding the cultural and biblical context of a passage. Remember the interpreter’s rule of thumb: “A text is best understood in its context.” What was behind the backdrop of Paul’s meeting?



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Lurking in the shadows was a group of legalists who questioned Paul's mission to Gentiles and hindered the growth of Christianity. To understand the issue and its serious threat, take a few minutes to consult a commentary on this passage. We recommend *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* as a reliable resource. For an online resource, consult William Barclay's commentary on Galatians 2:4–5 at StudyLight.org. Record what you discover about the identity of these legalists, the crux of their complaint, and their threat to the gospel.

Notice the sly nature of these legalists. They “sneaked in to spy on [Paul]” (2:4), and their devious intent was threefold: “take away the freedom [Christians] have in Christ Jesus,” “enslave” them, and “force [them] to follow their Jewish regulations” (2:4).

Legalists harass Christians who have freedom in Christ by spying and enslaving. Explain in your own words what this looks like today?

Legalists don't announce they're coming. They don't announce their presence. They sneak and spy. Why? To bring us into bondage, get us back in the cell, and lock the door. —Chuck Swindoll

Paul fought for his freedom and the freedom of the young Gentile converts. He fought against those who taught heresy and who harassed others. He also fought against a third type of adversary: those who lie and deceive through hypocrisy.



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16



Correlation: The Adversary of Hypocrisy—Galatians 2:11–16

The third adversary appears in Paul's account of his rebuke of Peter. We can use correlation to compare this passage with Peter's vision in [Acts 10:9–16](#). What did Peter see, and what was the meaning of the vision?

When Peter visited Cornelius what did he say to this God-fearing Gentile (Acts 10:28–29)?

In Christ, the barrier between Jew and Gentile no longer exists (Ephesians 2:14–18). God first revealed this truth to Peter, who should have been bold in standing his ground for the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church. Yet Peter succumbed to the insidious adversary of hypocrisy and could have caused great division had Paul not corrected him. Read the account as Paul described it in [Galatians 2:11–16](#), and write down what happened.



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Hypocrisy is a treacherous thing—acting like we believe one way with a certain set of people, then acting like we believe another way with another group. What does Peter’s lapse into hypocrisy and legalism warn you about your own susceptibility to the same traps? Could the fear of other peoples’ opinions cause you to yield to legalists too?

Legalists are all about seeking the favor of other people. Legalists expect you to please them. It’s all about the flesh. It’s pride! —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Four Strong Defenses against Legalism

If we’re determined to live free, we must take steps to guard our freedom. In his message, Chuck erected four defensive walls against legalism.

- *Keep standing for your freedom.* If a group of people doesn’t honor your convictions or respect God’s guidance in your life, leave the group!
- *Stop seeking the favor of everyone.* Seek the favor of God alone rather than looking to others for approval, no matter how spiritual they may seem.
- *Start identifying legalism.* Don’t turn a blind eye to legalism when it’s in your presence.
- *Continue embracing biblical truth.* Live honestly. Where Scripture is clear, say so. Otherwise, in the multitude of gray areas, draw principles from Scripture, pray for guidance through the Holy Spirit, and move forward with courage and without judging others.

If you’re prone to people-pleasing like Peter, what can you do to avoid trading your liberty just to impress legalists?



Standing Your Ground for Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 2:1–16

Are there times when you act differently around different groups of people? How can you avoid falling into the trap of hypocrisy?

Have you been the victim of those who control others with heresy, harassment, or hypocrisy? What happened? How is God encouraging you to stand your ground through the truths of this study?

How is God answering your opening prayer to help you live in liberty and avoid the bondage of legalism?

Our “grace awakening” began when we stopped trying to earn favor with God through personal merit and started trusting fully in Christ’s work on our behalf. We’re saved by grace so that we can live in grace. It’s a lifestyle of freedom worth fighting for!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the joy of a daily, dependent, life-giving relationship with Christ. Protect me from the pitfalls of heresy, harassment, and hypocrisy that characterize the legalists who pressure me to conform to a life that is not from You. Guide me in the path of freedom of obedience to Your Son, Jesus, in whose name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 71, 72.
2. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, 72–73.
3. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, 73, 74.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY SEVEN

If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15

By the power of Christ who indwells you, you don't have to sin. Now think about that. You really don't have to sin!

—Charles R. Swindoll

DURING the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of Americans lost their lives over the issue of slavery. It was a bloody conflict, the bloodiest in United States history. Even as battles raged and soldiers died, President Abraham Lincoln declared freedom for the slaves in his Emancipation Proclamation on New Year's Day, 1863. In 1865, the smoke of war finally cleared, and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was officially adopted, forever abolishing slavery in the United States.

Although pronounced by presidential decree, ratified in the Constitution, and purchased by blood, liberty was slow in reaching the plantations where slaves toiled. Some owners hushed the news to keep their labor force working. Others strong-armed slaves with threats. The fear of living as a freed slave in a hostile culture held some slaves on the plantations. As a result, many of those who had the legal right to freedom could not, didn't know how, or simply chose not to live free. How tragic!

How tragic also is the fact that many Christians remain enslaved to sin and shackled to shame despite the precious blood Christ spilled to pay their ransom and God's emancipation declaration, "You are free from your slavery to sin" (Romans 6:18).

Are you experiencing freedom from sin's mastery? Perhaps you think you can't live free or you don't know how, or maybe you simply choose not to. In this study, we'll examine Romans 6 and discover Paul's plan for living free from sin and shame.



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If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare your heart to hear God's Word today, review Paul's analogies regarding slavery in his letter to the Romans. First, all of us were born in bondage to sin.

*"No one is righteous—
no not even one."* (Romans 3:10)

Sin gave the orders, and we had no power to resist. But then, a day came when Christ set us free! Read Paul's declaration of freedom in Romans 7:5–6. Can you hear the liberty bell ring?

When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.
(Romans 7:5–6)

Slowly reread Paul's words of liberation in these verses. In prayer, thank the Lord that He has freed you from your former captor, and express your deepest desire to serve Him. Ask Him to reveal the "new way of living in the Spirit" (7:6) through our study of Romans 6.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Romans 6 can be divided into two sections which answer two questions about grace. In the first part of the chapter, Paul answered the question in 6:1, and in the last part of the chapter, he answered the question in 6:15. Although these questions look similar, they address our freedom from different angles. Let's take a closer look.



If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15



Observation: Understanding the Themes of Romans 6

A chart is a helpful tool to record observations, particularly contrasts. Read the verses in the chart below, looking at them closely. Write down any contrasts you observe regarding the type of person who might ask the question, and define the issue addressed about grace.

	Romans 6:1	Romans 6:15
	<i>Should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?</i>	<i>Since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning?</i>
Who might ask this question?		
What issue about grace is addressed?		

Can you see slight differences in perspective? As Chuck observed these verses, he noticed that the question in Romans 6:1 seemed to refer to people who *failed to claim their liberty*, like freed slaves who remain in bondage. For these people, the issue was grace *nullification*. Since the grace that set them free had no practical effect, its power to transform was not utilized.

Additionally, Chuck noticed that the question in Romans 6:15 seemed to refer to people who *took freedom too far*. They viewed their liberty as a license to sin, and for them the issue was grace *abuse*.

To both questions about whether we can keep on sinning, Paul's immediate response was emphatic: "Of course not!" (Romans 6:2, 15). Then he explained how we live free from sin.

In this study, we'll focus on Romans 6:1–15, which is Paul's answer to the first question. We'll study Paul's answer to the second question in the next study, "Guiding Others to Freedom."



If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15



Interpretation: Living Out Our Freedom from Sin

In Romans 6:1–15, Paul offered three principles that direct us away from sin and light freedom's path to our new Master, Christ. The first principle is based on a theological truth that we must know.

Know Our Union with Christ

Read [Romans 6:2–9](#) in the New American Standard Bible, highlighting the word *know* in verses 3, 6, and 9.

What does it mean that we have been “baptized into Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:3 NASB)? Read 6:3 and 6:5 in the New Living Translation below for a clue to the meaning of baptism. What is the theological truth Paul was teaching in these verses?

Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? . . . Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.

Water baptism symbolizes our spiritual baptism, which is our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. When we trusted in the Savior for eternal life, we became “dipped” into His death and resurrection, and our identity changed (2 Corinthians 5:17). We didn't necessarily see the change, hear it, or feel it, but our identity changed nevertheless. What did Paul say are the implications of this theological truth regarding sin's power over our lives ([Romans 6:5–7](#))?

Victory over sin begins with *knowing* about our union with Christ, our new identity in Him, and the implications of this truth. But it's not enough simply to know the truth. The next step is essential.



If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15

When we came to Christ we were, by His Spirit, identified with Christ. He came to live within us; we came to live within Him. The strength that was His became our strength. Power that was His became our empowerment. Hope that He had became our hope. No fear of death became our no fear of death. We have been identified with Christ! —Chuck Swindoll

Consider Ourselves Dead to Sin

Find the word *consider* in [Romans 6:10–11](#). What did Christ accomplish through His death (Romans 6:10)?

Because of Christ's victory over death, what should we consider ourselves to be (6:11)?

Why do you think considering ourselves “dead to the power of sin and alive to God” (6:11) is essential for experiencing victory over sin?

Paul's points about knowing and considering culminate with two commands that form the center point of Paul's teaching: “Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires” (6:12). Only through Christ's sin-breaking and life-giving power can we obey these commands. But there's one more step on the path to freedom.



If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15

Present Ourselves to Our New Master

The first step was *theological*; the second step was *intellectual*; now this third step is *volitional*. Find the word *present* in the NASB version of [Romans 6:13–14](#). What do these verses mean? You might wish to read [Romans 6:13–14](#) in the NLT as well. Put the ideas from these verses into your own words as if Paul were writing them to you personally.

In our lives before accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior, we didn't have the power to stop sinning. Now we have the power! We can say with confidence, "Sin is no longer my master!"



Correlation: Grace Greater Than Our Sin

The sin nature is strong, but grace is stronger! Read [Romans 5:18–20](#) and write down what you learn about the power of grace to supersede sin.

The more the sin, the more abundant God's grace to empower us to "serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit" (Romans 7:6).



Application: Practical Warnings

In his message, Chuck compared defeating a sinful habit with an old seaman harpooning a whale. Fighting our sin may feel like we're outmatched by forces greater than we can handle, but victory is possible. Know your union to Christ, consider yourself dead to sin, and present yourself to your new Master, Christ.



If You're Free, Why Not Live Like It?

Romans 6:1–15

As you think about a sin you'd like to tame, what do you now *know* that can help you say no to this sin?

What do you need to *consider* in order to say yes to righteousness?

And how can you *present* yourself to righteousness rather than to sin?

We were chained to sin, standing on the slave block. Out of the love of His heart and the grace of His act, Jesus saved us. He not only set us free, He threw away the chains and said, "You are freed to serve Me, carry out My works of righteousness, and live the kind of empowered life I lived. I give new life to you and by my grace, you are free!" —Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You have the power. I don't. You have authority. I don't. Since You live in me, I ask You to answer the door when sin knocks. I ask You to take charge of my life right now to keep me from sin. In the victorious name of Jesus, amen.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY EIGHT

Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23

I would like to so develop the doctrine of grace in my life that I can be, through the power of Christ, as He is—accepting and yet pure, free and yet wise, enjoying what He has provided yet never flaunting, giving people room to be all that God would have them be yet never once deceiving them into thinking sin will lead them there. That's a grace frame of mind.

—Charles R. Swindoll

GOD has blessed His children with freedom from sin and shame. But, sadly, not all Christians live free—such as those we addressed in the last study. Shackled by an iron chain of shame resulting from patterns of failure and habitual sin, they fail to leave their old master. In Romans 6:1–14, you'll recall that Paul guided Christ followers with three steps to freedom from sin:

1. *To know* about their union with Christ and their new identity in Him
2. *To consider* themselves dead to sin
3. *To present* themselves in service to Christ who loves them unconditionally

While some Christians fail to leave their old master, others take their freedom too far. They also serve sin but *without guilt*. They reason that since they are under grace and not the law, they can do whatever they please. In other words, if no police officers lurk behind speed limit signs, why not rev up the RPMs and go full throttle? They shamelessly cheat on their spouse, cover up their shady dealings, bully people, take what isn't theirs, and on and on, racing through life under the green flag of grace.



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Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a quiet moment to meditate on the following declarations of our freedom in Christ.

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. . . . So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.” (John 8:31–32, 36)

For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. (Romans 6:7)

And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. (8:2)

Write out a brief prayer asking the Lord to empower you with His grace, to guide you into the freedom from sin He has promised you, and to open your heart to the truth in His Word through this study of Romans 6:15–23.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Romans 6:15–23](#) to get an overview of the passage. As you read, make mental notes of the series of contrasts between our old way of life serving sin (“you were” Romans 6:17, 20) and our new way of life serving Christ (“now” 6:17–19, 22).



Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23



Observation: Careful Warnings to All Who Are Free

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. In particular, we look for central ideas, such as the overall principle Paul stated in [Romans 6:16](#).

Overall Principle

In this verse, Paul presented the big idea or the central proposition of the passage, and he wrote it emphatically as if in all caps: “DON’T YOU REALIZE. . . ?” (Romans 6:16). What was the truth Paul desperately wanted his readers to understand? For additional insight, here’s a paraphrase of Romans 6:16 from *The Message*:

You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it’s your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits.



Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23

Past Identity versus Present Identity

Building on his main idea, Paul contrasted our past identity as slaves with our present identity in Christ. In the chart below, fill in the contrasting points Paul described in [Romans 6:17–22](#). The first one is filled in for you.

	Past Identity	Present Identity
Romans 6:17	“Once you were slaves of sin”	“but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you”
Romans 6:18		
Romans 6:19		
Romans 6:20–22		

With these contrasts, Paul has guided us to freedom step by step. We can summarize Paul’s progression of thought like this:

- When I was lost, I was enslaved to sin (“Once you were slaves of sin,” Romans 6:17).
- My slavery to sin only grew worse (“ever deeper into sin,” 6:19).
- Through Christ, I was freed from slavery to sin (“Now you are free,” 6:18).
- When I was converted, I changed masters (“slaves to righteous living,” 6:18).



Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23

Central Command and Ultimate Results

These stepping stones lead us to Paul's central command: "Now you must *give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living* so that you will become holy" (Romans 6:19, emphasis added).

Because we're under grace and not the law, we have freedom of choice. What did Paul say are the results if we choose to *disobey* his command and the results if we *obey* it? Read [Romans 6:20–23](#) for the answers.

Grace guides us to a crossroads, doesn't it? At this junction, we are free to choose whether to obey sin or God. But, as Paul made it clear, we're not free to choose the consequences of our choice.



Interpretation: Living Out Our Freedom over Sin

In his book *The Grace Awakening*, Chuck Swindoll illustrated that grace frees us to choose our actions . . . but not the consequences of our actions.

Life is like a menu in the Grace Restaurant. In this new establishment you are free to choose whatever you want. But whatever you choose will be served to you, and you must eat it. If you choose the wrong food and realize later just how badly your body reacted to it, don't think that grace will protect you from getting sick.¹

In light of Chuck's illustration, reflect on the meaning of the words *death* and *life* in Romans 6:23. We often use this verse as an invitation to a non-Christian to receive the free gift of salvation, and that's a valid application.

However, look again at [Romans 6:22–23](#) in its context. Paul was addressing carnal Christians who thought they could eat anything they wanted on the "menu" of life and not suffer the consequences of their sinful choices because they were under grace. In this context, what was Paul saying to Christians, not about life in heaven but about a heavenly kind of life on earth?



Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23

Want to know the kind of employer sin is? He's horrible! Every time you cash a check that comes from sin, it's got death written all over it. An awful ache in the soul. A constant battle with guilt. A loss of personal testimony. A breakdown of integrity. A sudden stoppage of growth until you deal with it. The beginning stages of iniquity, which becomes addictive as time passes. That's the death that comes from sin's wages. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Warnings from Proverbs

What warnings do the wise sayings in [Proverbs 5:21–23](#) offer?

Sin is the worst sort of master, but we exhibit wisdom like Solomon's when we choose God as our Master. No one can live without a master; we all need guidance. The question is which master will we choose?



Application: Helpful Reminders That Keep Us Balanced

As we conclude, let's tie a couple of strings around our finger as reminders of the balance necessary to walk with Christ.

- *Abusing grace stagnates us.* It dulls our spiritual taste buds to the sweetness of God. It causes us to live casual, indifferent lives instead of committed ones.
- *Living in freedom motivates us.* It motivates us to choose a righteous lifestyle in the power of the Spirit through the indwelling presence of Christ who gives us the grace we need to do what we can't do in our own strength.

If you've been choosing to follow the wrong master, what consequences have you experienced?



Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15–23

What steps can you take to change masters? Perhaps you can talk to a trusted friend about your desire to change and ask him or her to help guide you to freedom. Perhaps you can meet with your pastor or Christian counselor for guidance. What ideas do you have?

Finally, what about the loved ones you know who are racing through life at a reckless clip, running past stop signs, and not caring about the consequences? Based on our study of Romans 6:15–23, what can you share with your loved ones to guide them to true freedom?

In the next study, “The Grace to Let Others Be,” we’ll learn ways to show grace toward others when we have strong disagreements. Until then, let’s conclude Romans 6 with a final prayer and a personal commitment to live free under the authority of our new Master.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You sent Your Son to give me life in abundance. The kind of life I’ll feast on in heaven someday is the kind of life I can taste today as I live in Your kingdom, surrendered to Your authority as my Master. Forgive my lapses into sin when I lose sight of Your grace. Thank You for settling the issue of my forgiveness at the cross where Jesus died for me. Help me love others with the same grace with which You love me. Help those I love to know the joy and freedom of serving You. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 131.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY NINE

The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17

Horizontal grace centers on our relationships with others. Relieved from our guilt and shame, we're free from the tyranny of pleasing people. We're free from others' demands and expectations, and they're free from ours. When we demonstrate horizontal grace, we accept others as they are.

—Charles R. Swindoll

SEVERAL years ago, the eyes of the world were drawn to the dramatic rescue of two stranded gray whales. The Alaskan winter arrived early that year, and an ever-increasing covering of solid ice cut off the whales from the open sea. A few kindhearted Eskimos with chainsaws attempted to slice through the ice to preserve a breathing hole for the whales. Media outlets broadcast the Eskimos' valiant efforts, and soon volunteers arrived with heavy machinery and a determination to save the whales.

But the volunteers' energy was soon exhausted. So the National Guard sent helicopters to drop five-ton concrete bashers to break up the ice. Then, in a joint effort with the United States, the Soviet Union dispatched two massive ice-breaking ships to carve a channel so the whales could swim to freedom.

Rescuing the whales required the combined resources of two governments, three weeks of heavy labor, and a cost of more than one million dollars. If humans will go to such lengths to set free creatures of the sea, how much further will God go to break sin's icy grip on us and lead us to freedom!

However, instead of enjoying God's ocean of grace, many Christians are still trapped—not by sin but legalism. Legalism with its layers of restrictions cuts them off from freedom and smothers them with shame. What is needed? Grace . . . not only vertical grace from God to free us from sin but also horizontal grace from us toward each other to free us from the grip of legalism.



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The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let's begin our study by meditating on a truth that is the foundation for grace-based relationships: "We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other" (Romans 12:5).

Think about the phrase "we are many parts." God did not stamp all of us out of the same mold. He delights in our differences and encourages us to be individuals—unique in personality, interests, gifts, appearance, and style. Shouldn't we encourage individuality too?

Legalism, however, requires that we all be alike, unified in convictions and uniform in appearance. Legalists use *comparison* to measure everyone by a singular standard and *control* to manipulate people through fear, threats, and criticism. Legalists tolerate only one style of music or fashion, one way to manage money, one way to rear children, and so on.

Legalism locks people in a frozen state so they can't be themselves or make their own choices. Grace's first task is to bash holes in the ice formed by comparison and control so that we can breathe and become the unique "us" God designed.

Do you feel trapped by others comparing and controlling you? If so, in what ways? In the space below, tell the Lord what you've been through. And then pray that, through this study, you'll experience God's grace to be you and then set others free too.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Romans 14:1–17* slowly and thoughtfully, observing carefully the flow of thought. Reading a passage aloud helps to focus your thoughts and tune out distractions.



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17



Observation: Paul's Instructions for Grace Living

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of observation requires that we take a close look at the words and phrases in a passage. Notice comparisons, contrasts, lists, descriptions, and definitions. Use the following questions as a guide to help you examine our passage in depth.

Romans 14:1–4

What are the two commands in Romans 14:1?

How did Paul describe the two types of Christians in 14:2? Which type was “weak in faith” (Romans 14:1)?

In 14:3, Paul commanded the first type of Christian to “not look down on” weak Christians who have sensitive consciences. Compare this command with the two commands in 14:1. Write these three commands together in one statement that summarizes Paul's instructions to the first type of Christian.

In what way should those who didn't eat certain foods (the “weak”) show grace toward those who did eat certain foods (14:3)? What basis did Paul give for this command (14:4)?



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17

Romans 14:5–8

According to Paul, those who ate any type of food also worshiped the Lord on any day of the week. They believed “every day [was] alike” (Romans 14:5). What did those with food convictions think about certain days of the week (14:5)? And why did they “worship the Lord on a special day” (14:6)?

Although the two types of Christians differed on food and days of the week, they were aligned at the heart level. What deeply held beliefs united these opposing Christians (14:6–8)?

Romans 14:9–12

In Romans 14:9–12, Paul appealed to the two groups of Christians not to condemn or look down on them but for what important reason?



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17

Romans 14:13–17

Instead of judging one another, what did Paul say the two groups of Christians should do instead (Romans 14:13)?

What was Paul's personal conviction about food (14:14)?

What guiding principle did Paul follow when eating food in the presence of others with different convictions (14:15–16)?

What characteristics of life in the kingdom of God should guide all our interactions (14:17)?

Now that we've observed what Paul said to these first-century Christians, let's explore the meaning of Paul's words and draw some universal truths that we can apply to our relationships today.



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17



Interpretation: Some Biblical Guidelines That Magnify Grace

Accurate interpretation of a passage depends on a clear understanding of the cultural context. Although issues about diet and days of the week might not rattle us today, they created extreme tension in the early church. Take a moment to read the background of these issues in a commentary, such as *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. For online study, you may wish to consult lumina.bible.org. Go to this link, and select Constable's Notes on the right column. Read the section "Conduct within Christian Liberty." What did you discover about those with a sensitive conscience about food and days of the week as compared to those who were free to eat anything and worship anytime?

Christian converts from Judaism, which had strict food and Sabbath regulations, were most likely the ones sensitive about diet and holy days. They judged those who ate anything—particularly meat that may have been offered to idols. These legalistic Jewish Christians *condemned* the others: "How can you eat that?" Rather than loving in return, the liberated Christians reacted with *contempt*: "Why wouldn't you eat that?" Condemnation and contempt infected all the relationships and made for a very unhealthy church!¹

What medicine did Paul prescribe for this relationally sick church? A tonic of grace mixed with generous doses of love, dispensed in four guidelines for relationships.

Accept Others

The problem in the Roman church was not a food problem. It was a love problem, an *acceptance* problem. The problem still exists in churches today. Reread Romans 14:1–4, then write down a principle you discover about Christians accepting one another.



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17

Without the balm of grace and love, a heated reaction can erupt over any contentious issue: music styles, make-up, jewelry, movies, dancing, food, drink, houses, clothes, spiritual practices, and the list goes on. Accepting Christians who don't act like we act or think like we think is basic to letting them be themselves.

Allow the Lord to Direct Others' Lives

Write down a second guideline based on Romans 14:5–8. Focus on how Paul refused to dictate what his readers should do but allowed freedom for the Lord to direct their lives.

“We belong to the Lord,” Paul stated (Romans 14:8). Give people freedom to grow at the pace God leads them, to fail sometimes, and to learn from their own mistakes.

Don't Judge Others

What guideline about not judging others do you discover in Romans 14:9–12?

Freeing others means that we never assume a position we're not qualified to fill, namely, that of judge. We have blind spots. We don't know all the facts. We can't perceive people's true motives. And we certainly don't know God's will for someone else's life.

Express Liberty Wisely

What additional principle about limiting our freedom for the sake of love can you find in Romans 14:13–17?



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17

One way to show love is to express our liberty wisely by not flaunting our freedom but enjoying it in such a way that doesn't ruin others' faith.

Before applying these principles, let's take one more step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study: correlation.



Correlation: Warnings from Proverbs

Correlating Scripture validates the truth we've discovered in one passage using a text from another passage. What similar instruction did Paul deliver to the Corinthian believers in *1 Corinthians 8:9–13*?

In summary, we magnify grace in our relationships when we accept one another, let the Lord direct others' lives, refuse to judge others, and express liberty wisely—all governed by the rule of love!



Application: Helpful Reminders That Keep Us Balanced

Let's consider a few actions that will put these guidelines into practice.

- *Concentrate on things that encourage peace and assist other's growth.* As Paul said in Romans 14:19, "Let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up."
- *Remember that sabotaging saints hurts the work of God.* When we tear down our fellow believers we "tear apart the work of God" (Romans 14:20).
- *Exercise your liberty only with those who can enjoy it with you.* Keep some liberties private so others don't stumble. That's not deception; that's wisdom.
- *Determine where you stand and refuse to play God in anyone else's life.* What is God doing in your life? When you're totally absorbed with answering that question, you won't compare or control others.



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17

What additional application points based on the principles from this study can you add?

Reflecting on Romans 14:1–17, which verse or phrase seems to have your name on it as particularly relevant to you?

What is the Lord revealing to you about grace and love in your relationships? How can you respond with practical life change?

Imagine if all your relationships were characterized by the four guidelines we studied in Romans 14. You and those you love would be like the liberated whales swimming in the open sea, free to be the individuals who God designed without the need for comparison or control. Commit yourself now to avoid the traps of legalism and help set others free.

Close your time opening your heart to God's grace. He loves you as no other person can. Breathe in His acceptance and grace so you can live out acceptance and grace toward those you love.



The Grace to Let Others Be

Romans 14:1–17



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your care, which is constant and overflowing, totally free of comparison and control. Thank You for Your kindness which frees me from those who intend to trap me under restrictions and control me with shame. I am Yours today, released to follow Your will and be the person You created—free to swim in Your ocean of grace. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. In Romans 12:6–21, Paul described in detail the attitudes and behaviors of a relationally healthy church.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY TEN

The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40

There will always be opposing viewpoints. Perspectives will be as varied as the number of people in the room. Certainly, not all will think as you or I think. If you cannot live with that tension, you won't be as competent a leader as you could be. Disagreements are inevitable.

—Charles R. Swindoll

ONE of the marks of maturity is the ability to disagree without becoming disagreeable. And that takes grace. In fact, handling disagreements with tact is one of the crowning achievements of grace.

The account of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36–40 is a case study in handling conflict with grace. As we step into this passage, let's acknowledge four realities to enlighten our study. First, although we may try to avoid conflict, *disagreements are inevitable*. Tastes and opinions vary from person to person. Pick any divisive subject—parenting, politics, economics, fashion, diet, music, or theology—and you'll find people positioned on both sides of the fence.

Additionally, *even the godly will sometimes disagree*. Does this fact surprise you? Two people who wholeheartedly love the Lord and His Word can stand divided on certain issues.

Speaking of “issues,” *in every disagreement there will be a root issue and opposing viewpoints*. The issue involves principles and is usually objective. Viewpoints involve personalities and tend to be subjective. By calmly defining the issue and seeking to understand both points of view, we can navigate most disagreements.

Here's a final thought—*in many disagreements, each side is valid*. Often, conflicts are not a matter of who's right and who's wrong. Both sides can be equally right though they hold different perspectives. It's possible to agree about the essentials of the faith but to disagree over the nonessentials. Strongly held beliefs can even lead to separation in a relationship—as in the case of Paul and Barnabas.



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The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to bring before the Lord a disagreement that you've had or that may arise with a certain individual if you state your point of view. What was or could be the central issue?

What are your viewpoints regarding this issue?

Tell the Lord your concerns about your relationship with this person and ask Him to reveal principles from His Word that can guide you.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We open the case file of Paul versus Barnabas as the two missionaries discuss a plan to “go back and visit each city where [they] previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers [were] doing” (Acts 15:36).¹ On this plan, they agreed. But then they hit a reef of conflict, as even godly friends do.



The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40

What was their point of disagreement (*Acts 15:37–38*)?

Paul and Barnabas' argument related to some rough seas they encountered on their first missionary journey. Among the many troubles on the trip was the heartbreaking desertion of "their assistant" John Mark (13:5). He abandoned the mission in the port town of Perga on the coast of Pamphylia. The text doesn't mention the reason, just the fact: "John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem" (13:13).

Let's do a little digging to discover who John Mark was and some possible motives for him abandoning ship.



Observation: Background of the Disagreement

In our *Searching the Scriptures* method, a handy tool to help unlock the meaning of a passage is a map of the region during that period of history. Visualize the physical backdrop of the story by locating Pamphylia on a map. We recommend *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* by Carl G. Rasmussen, which you can purchase in the Insight for Living Ministries online store. This resource contains an excellent set of maps of the missionary journeys of Paul. You can also find Paul's journeys in the maps section of your Bible.

Trace the route of Paul's first missionary journey from Antioch in Syria through the island of Cyprus and then north to the coast of Pamphylia and beyond. Find the city of Perga, noticing its location in the Cestrus River plain at the foot of the treacherous Taurus Mountains.

Next, go to the website [Bible History Online](#) and read the article "Pamphylia" in the *ISBE Bible Dictionary*. What do you learn from this intriguing discussion of the history and conditions of the region?



The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40

Why Did John Mark Leave?

Bible commentators have offered various theories to solve the puzzle of why John Mark deserted the team to return to Jerusalem. One clue was his destination. To whom in Jerusalem may John Mark have longed to return, and how may that longing have played into his decision (*Acts 12:12*)?

Another clue is buried in Paul's comment to the Galatian believers about Paul's poor health when he first met them (after John Mark left). Read *Galatians 4:13* in light of what you learned about "excessively hot" Pamphylia above, and then surmise a reason for John Mark calling it quits.

Other possibilities are listed in Constable's Notes on Acts 13:13 at lumina.bible.org. Go to Constable's Notes in the right column and locate the comments at verse 13 under the heading "Arrival at Pamphylia." Whether one or all of these motives prompted John Mark to leave, the bottom line is that in the heat of battle, the young soldier went AWOL.



Interpretation: Some Biblical Guidelines That Magnify Grace

What meaning can we find in Paul and Barnabas' disagreement over John Mark? Notice the words used to describe the intensity of their argument. "Paul disagreed *strongly*" (Acts 15:38, emphasis added). And "there occurred such a *sharp disagreement*" (15:39 NASB, emphasis added). This was no calm conversation in a coffee shop!

The issue that sparked the clash between Paul and Barnabas was this: *Should someone who had deserted them in the past be given a second chance?* Barnabas said, "Yes!" Paul countered, "No way!"



The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40

In his commentary *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts*, Chuck peeled back the English biblical text to reveal the argument's passionate intensity as reflected in the Greek:

In Acts 15:37–38, the phrases “wanted to take” and “kept insisting” both use imperfect tense verbs, which indicates ongoing or repetitive action. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark and wouldn't let the issue go. Paul felt equally determined and refused to relent. Neither man would back down, which caused the argument to escalate to the point of “sharp disagreement” (*paroxysmos* [3948]). We derive our English word “paroxysm” from this Greek term. . . . Classical Greek medical writers use the word to describe a sudden, violent spasm, such as a body-racking cough or an epileptic seizure. The air grew thick with passion as each man convulsed with fiery emotion in response to the other.²

As with most heated disagreements, *aspects of both viewpoints can be valid*. On the one hand, Barnabas was concerned about his cousin. Yes, John Mark was his *cousin* (Colossians 4:10)! On the other hand, Paul was concerned about the mission.

In the following space, write your understanding of Barnabas' position. And write your understanding of Paul's position.

For Barnabas, the issue involved his own flesh and blood and the future of a promising minister. For Paul, it was a matter of the salvation of souls and the future of Christianity. In Barnabas' sight line was the *man*; in Paul's, the *ministry*.³



The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40



Correlation: A Biblical Case for Both Sides

Correlating Scripture validates the truth we've discovered in one passage with a text from another. As you consider Barnabas' and Paul's points of view, list the reasons for and against giving John Mark a second chance. To prompt your thinking, we've included a few Bible verses that the men could have referenced to support their case.

<p>Barnabas' Viewpoint <i>Psalm 103:8–10; Acts 9:26–30; 11:25–26</i></p>	<p>Paul's Viewpoint <i>Proverbs 25:19; Luke 9:62</i></p>

Each view aligns with Scripture. Both sides have merit. Even so, neither man backed down. Unable to find middle ground, these two missionaries whose relationship held the closest of filial bonds chose the only course on which they could agree. Read *Acts 15:39–41*, then write down what happened.

How did God bring good out of a difficult situation? Paul went on to plant churches through Asia and Europe, and Barnabas mentored John Mark, who later became the writer of the gospel of Mark and the object of Paul's highest regard (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). The separation strategy worked. John Mark got his second chance *and* Christianity spread!



The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40



Application: Modeling Grace through Disagreeable Times

We will always encounter people with whom we disagree. We can't escape that. But we can learn to disagree graciously. Here are four suggestions to help you model grace when those disagreeable times come.

- *Always leave room for an opposing viewpoint.* Few attitudes in relationships are as destructive as a completely closed mind.
- *If an argument does occur, don't insult or assassinate the other person's character.* An argument is one thing. Character assassination and name-calling is another. If you must spar with someone over an issue, fight fair.
- *If you don't get your way, get over it and get on with your life.* If you lose an argument even though you believed you were in the right, don't bear a grudge. Take it on the chin, as the saying goes. Life is too short to be petty and pouty after losing an argument.
- *Sometimes the best solution is separation.* The situation with Paul and Barnabas set a biblical precedent for separation, even permanent separation. We never read of Paul and Barnabas ministering together again. Separation is never easy, but it may be God's way of moving you on to another dimension of ministry.

What application point based on the principles from this study can you apply to your life?

Reflect on the situation you prayed about in the "Prepare Your Heart" section on page 2. How might the principles and application points from this study help guide you?



The Grace to Disagree . . . and Press On

Acts 15:36–40

What next step is God telling you to take in your difficult relationship?

How you handle disagreements will determine the health of your relationships. Take it from the example of Paul and Barnabas: disagreements happen. And when they do, handle them with grace.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see issues from all points of view. Deliver me from being closed-minded and disagreeable. Make me both a “forgiver” like Barnabas and an “achiever” like Paul—a person who balances forgiving grace and missional passion. And when I get involved in a conflict with another person, shine the light on our path together so we both know our next steps are in Your will. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For another study on the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, see the *Searching the Scriptures* study “What If You Need a Second Chance?” from the sermon series, *What If . . . ?* by Charles R. Swindoll, https://insightforliving.swncdn.com/pdf/retail/series/What_If_STS_Studies.pdf.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 311. You can purchase this commentary at our [online store](#).
3. For an insightful imaginary dialogue between Paul and Barnabas, see Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2003), 171–72.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY ELEVEN

Bringing Grace Up Close *Selected Scriptures*

God's goal, simply stated, is to make us like Christ.

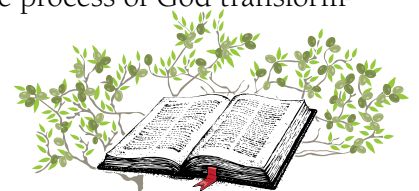
—Charles R. Swindoll

MORE than three hundred years ago, John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory of a man's spiritual journey from this life to the next. Many of us are familiar with the central character's name, Christian. Not many, though, recall that the man's original name before he fled his home in the City of Destruction was Graceless.¹

We were all “graceless” until God showered us with His grace through the redeeming work of Christ. At that moment of salvation when we received God's grace through faith in Christ, God adopted us as His children, named us after His own Son, *Christian*, and set us on a lifelong pilgrimage of making us like the One whose name we bear. Several passages describe God's sanctifying process.

- *God conforms us.* “He also predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29 NASB).
- *God creates us anew as His masterpiece.* “We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:10).
- *God completes His work in us.* “God . . . will continue his work until it is finally finished” (Philippians 1:6).
- *God renews us.* “Be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him” (Colossians 3:10).

How does God conform, create, complete, and renew us? With the same grace by which He saved us. Grace is both the means of our salvation and the fuel for our sanctification, which is the process of God transforming us into the kind of people who think, feel, and behave like Jesus.



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Bringing Grace Up Close

Selected Scriptures

We are all pilgrims in progress, moving from a grace-less condition apart from Christ to a grace-full life with Christ. What footpath should we follow toward this goal? In this study, we'll visit three passages that address three ways God transforms our character through His work of grace in us.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open your heart and invite God to empower you with His grace to do what you cannot do in your own strength. As we will learn through our study, God “gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5), so in a prayer of humility, confess your need for grace in an area of your life and lay that need before the Lord. If you wish, use the following space to write a brief prayer.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We'll employ a different *Searching the Scriptures* technique for each of the three passages. First, let's observe 1 Corinthians 15:6–11. Read the passage below slowly and, if you wish, aloud so that you can focus on the words and flow of thought. Paul was referring to those who saw the resurrected Lord as he wrote the following:

After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.



Bringing Grace Up Close

Selected Scriptures



Observation: Claiming the Grace to Be What I Am

Did you notice how often Paul referred to himself? In our *Searching the Scriptures* method, we always identify repetition in the passage. Circle or highlight the personal pronoun *I* in the text above, and in the space below, write down what Paul said about himself.

Why did Paul consider himself “born at the wrong time,” “least,” and “not even worthy” (1 Corinthians 15:8–9)? Because in his past, he persecuted the church. Similar feelings of *inferiority* and *insecurity* might plague us when we consider our past mistakes and sins.

God, however, pulled Paul out of his insecurity when He called Paul to preach with confidence the gospel of Christ ([Acts 9:15](#)). How? The clue is in what follows the two conjunctions *but* and *yet* in 1 Corinthians 15:10. Reread this verse above and underline or highlight in a different color these words and the phrases that follow them. What did God do in Paul’s life, and what was the means of God’s transforming work?

In the same way God rescued Paul from sinking in a sea of shame, He can lift us up when we do as Paul did: focus on God’s work in us, not our sin, and *claim our new identity* as a people in fellowship with God through Christ.

The secret is claiming the grace to be what I am. People who live with a spoiled, ruined, even broken self-image have not grasped the grace of God. Grace gives you a new foundation on which to stand. It gives you a new security you do not have in yourself. —Chuck Swindoll



Bringing Grace Up Close

Selected Scriptures



Interpretation: Claiming the Grace to Admit That I Am Weak

For the next passage, let's use our interpretation tools to understand Paul's paradoxical statement in 2 Corinthians 12:10:

I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

What did Paul mean, “when I am weak, then I am strong?” How can strength come from weakness? We might guess at the meaning, but, according to the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, the interpretation we seek is Paul's intended meaning for his original audience, which we find by examining the context.

What was the cause of Paul's weakness and pain, according to [12:7](#), and how did he describe the cause?

Chuck's commentary [Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on 1 and 2 Corinthians](#) offers possible explanations of Paul's “thorn in the flesh.” If you have this resource, write down what you find out. For an online commentary, you might consult Constable's Notes at lumina.bible.org.

In what ways did Paul's weakness and its stabbing pain benefit him ([2 Corinthians 12:7–9](#))?



Bringing Grace Up Close

Selected Scriptures

Summarize your understanding of Paul’s intended meaning of the statement, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Paul endured severe *pain* and *weakness*. But when he *admitted his weaknesses*, he received the sufficiency and strength available only through God’s grace.

When you bring grace up close and personal in times of suffering and pain, you’re not afraid to admit that you’re weak. Stop all the nonsense of trying to make a great impression. Claim the grace to admit, “I am weak.” —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Claiming the Grace to Submit to What I Need

So far, we’ve observed that God transforms inferiority and insecurity into confidence as we claim the grace to be what we are—individuals in fellowship with God through Christ. We’ve understood how God transforms pain and weakness into strength as we claim the grace to admit our weaknesses. Now, let’s explore a third area that God transforms by comparing two verses side-by-side.

1 Peter 5:5–6	James 4:4–7
<p><i>In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for</i></p> <p><i>“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”</i></p> <p><i>So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.</i></p>	<p><i>I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say,</i></p> <p><i>“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”</i></p> <p><i>So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.</i></p>



Bringing Grace Up Close

Selected Scriptures

Both passages reference *Proverbs 3:34*. What are other similarities between 1 Peter 5:5–6 and James 4:4–7?

While Peter addressed relationships between younger and older people, James was concerned with our relationship with the world versus our relationship with God. In both cases, they both take aim at our general problem with *pride* and *stubbornness*. What is the spiritual cure to this problem, according to 1 Peter 5:6 and James 4:7, and what are the results?

If we stand erect before the throne of God with a spirit of self-sufficiency rather than fall prostrate before Him with a posture of submission, we walk away from His presence empty-handed. The only way for God to transform us from grace-less to grace-full people is for us to *acknowledge our need for grace and submit to God*.

*God tells you to humble yourself. See yourself as third in the list. Christ first, others next, you third.
Surrender. Release. Submit. —Chuck Swindoll*



Application: Modeling Grace through Disagreeable Times

Where are you in the process of transformation? Is God conforming, creating, completing, and renewing you in the areas of insecurity and inferiority? Pain and weakness? Or pride and stubbornness? Which area applies most to you? Is there another area in which God is working . . . or one in which you'd like to invite Him to work?



Bringing Grace Up Close

Selected Scriptures

You may need to tap into God's power by claiming the grace to

- Be what you are
- Admit your weakness
- Submit to your need for God

Do you need to take any or all of these paths in your pilgrimage? Express your answer to the Lord in the space below.

Lasting transformation doesn't happen in an instant; it often includes painful experiences that force us to depend on God, and it always requires us to leave what's comfortable and make a change. Keep in mind these three milestones—time, pain, and change—in the pilgrimage from earth to heaven or, according to Bunyan's allegory, the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. The journey may be long and perilous, but grace will see you through!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I trust Your Spirit to move in me and touch my heart. Thank You for delivering me from the valley of despair and self-deception and setting me on a pilgrimage of faith. I claim Your grace as my only source of power to do what I can't do on my own—gain confidence, relate to others with humility, and submit my pride to You. Thank You for providing a gateway to grace through Jesus, in whose name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. At the gate of the palace Beautiful, the porter named Watchful asked Christian his name: "My name is now *Christian*, but my name at the first was *Graceless*." John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Co., 1985), 46.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY TWELVE

Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures

Are you an example of grace in your ministry? Do you encourage independent thinking? Do people feel free to ask questions without you feeling threatened or suspicious? Do you encourage liberty? Or do you hold people hostage to your control? Do you really model grace?

—Charles R. Swindoll

A spirit of grace in a church doesn't appear out of nowhere; it springs from the Holy Spirit through the hearts of the ministers. Who are the ministers? The pastor, certainly, but also everyone who leads by serving, including teachers, helpers, counselors, elders, deacons, sponsors, and committee members. When those who minister model grace from the heart, grace in all its sweetness flows free. So, minister, here's a question worth asking yourself: *Do I really model grace in my church ministry?*

Members may hear about grace from the pulpit, but when projects need doing and people need prodding, ministers sometimes resort to using *human ingenuity* and *personality power* to strong-arm a task to completion. When we're under stress, our tendency is to operate out of the flesh and be less than gracious. If we're to treat people with grace, we need a deeper, spiritual source.

When Zerubbabel had trouble motivating the Jews who had returned from captivity to complete the temple, the Lord urged the frustrated leader not to twist people's arms to get the job done but to rely on God's Spirit:

"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'" (Zechariah 4:6–7 NASB)

The mountain-sized challenge that loomed before Zerubbabel would be reduced to a stroll in the plain—not through the bulldozing might of ingenuity or personality but by the power of God's Spirit. In the end, God got the glory as the people exclaimed that by grace and grace alone the temple was built.



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Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures

So the first and most basic lesson for ministers who set out to model grace in their churches is this: *minister in the power of the Spirit, not the flesh*. As you do, five characteristics of grace-filled living will flow through your church like streams of sweet water.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare your heart for this study, reread Zechariah 4:6–7 above. What mountain-sized challenges loom before you? Commit these challenges to the Lord in prayer. And ask the Lord to help you depend on the Spirit as you seek to model grace through the characteristics we'll examine in this study.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Centuries after Zerubbabel's reconstruction project, Herod rebuilt and expanded the temple and its courtyards into a massive edifice. While Herod with his ingenuity and power was erecting a temple of stone, God's Spirit was building a living and lasting temple "made without human hands" (Mark 14:58)—the resurrected body of Christ Himself and, by extension, the body of His church.

The following passages illustrate some of the ways the Spirit acts in us. "For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:16), and His Spirit is at work in us to showcase His grace to the world.



Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures



Observation: Modeling Grace in the First-Century Church

Review the following five passages and, using the *Searching the Scriptures* method of observation, identify the “who,” “what,” and “how.” In other words, who are the people in each passage (proper nouns), what did they do (action words), and how did they do it (adjectives and descriptors)?

Acts 4:32–35

Who?	What?	How?

Acts 11:19–24

Who?	What?	How?

2 Corinthians 3:5–6

Who?	What?	How?



Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures

2 Corinthians 3:17

Who?	What?	How?

1 Timothy 1:12–14

Who?	What?	How?

Now that you've identified the basic content of the verses, let's construct a principle for grace-living based on each passage.



Interpretation: Modeling Grace in the Twenty-First-Century Church

A principle is a truth that can apply to anyone in any culture in any era. It's like a fruit tree that we transplant from its original soil to the soil in our backyard. We discover the author's intended meaning planted in the "soil" of his original audience's hearts, transplanting it to our hearts today. Let's interpret the principle in the first passage we observed: generosity (Acts 4:32–35).



Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures

Generosity with Personal Possessions

According to Acts 4:32–35, members of the early church in Jerusalem “shared everything they had” (Acts 4:32) and, as a result, “there were no needy people among them” (4:34). We draw from their example this universal truth: *ministers who model grace are generous with their personal possessions with an absence of selfishness.*

List below some practical expressions of this principle for those who minister in the church?

Grace-oriented people are not stingy. They are generous with their money, with what they own, and with their time. They're not in it for what they get out of it; they're in it because they have the joy of giving. —Chuck Swindoll

Encouragement in Challenging Circumstances

According to Acts 11:19–24, the church leaders in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to encourage the Antioch Gentiles who were turning to faith in Christ. “When he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all” (Acts 11:23 NASB).

We infer from Barnabas’ example this universal truth: *ministers who model grace bring encouragement to challenging circumstances.* New works of grace, such as the gospel spreading to Gentiles, can be challenging for those stuck in the status quo. Traditionalism can suffocate God’s work when ministers aren’t encouragers. List below some practical expressions of this principle for ministers, particularly in new and challenging circumstances?

Grace-oriented people are not doomsday people. They're not naysayers. Rather, they say, “Trust God because He's sovereign and He's got a new thing in mind.” Bring cheer, bring hope, lift spirits, be a Barnabas. —Chuck Swindoll



Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures

Ministry beyond the “Letter” of the Law

According to 2 Corinthians 3:5–6, Paul based his adequacy on God who called him to minister by the leading of the Spirit, not the letter of the law, “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6 NASB). We glean this universal truth: *ministers who model grace minister beyond the letter of the law*. A grace-awakened shepherd doesn’t bash the sheep over the head with ultra-dogmatic teaching.

Paul modeled grace through his authenticity (2:17), relational style (3:1–4), and servant mind-set (3:6). List below some practical expressions of this principle for those who minister in the church, particularly regarding Bible teaching?

I believe in the inerrant Word of God with all my heart, but I also believe it’s not a club to beat people with. —Chuck Swindoll

Liberty for Creative Expression

According to 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul equated the presence of the Spirit with liberty: “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (NASB). We can draw this universal truth: *ministers who model grace allow liberty for creative expression*. There’s an absence of lock-stepped rigidity in how people express their gifts.

List below some practical expressions of this principle for those who minister in the church, particularly regarding creative expressions?

If you’re listening to teachers who hold you hostage, get away from there. There is only One worth following all the time, and His name is Jesus Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures

Release from Past Failures

According to 2 Timothy 1:12–14, Paul brought up his checkered past not to draw attention to himself but to God's grace. The principle is this: *ministers who model grace release others and themselves from past failures.*

List below some practical expressions of this principle for those who minister in the church, particularly regarding creative expressions?

Modeling grace may not happen overnight. It's a process of growth that comes as we follow Peter's counsel in our final passage.



Correlation: A Command for All Ministers

Peter wrapped up his second epistle with this warning and command that are fitting for ministers who seek to model grace:

So be on guard; then you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing. Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:17–18)

We're not alone in our journey of ministry. Jesus Christ is our faithful guide. Why would Peter draw our attention to Jesus as the ultimate model of grace?



Do You Really Model Grace?

Selected Scriptures



Application: How Can You Model Grace in Your Ministries

Through the power of the Spirit, we model Jesus' grace to others when we demonstrate generosity, encouragement, ministry beyond the "letter," liberty, and release from past failures.

You've explored how these principles might be put into practice, but now get personal. Which principle stands out to you as one in which you can grow in expressing grace? And in what practical ways can you model this principle this week?

As we said in the beginning, a spirit of grace in a church doesn't appear out of nowhere; it springs from the Holy Spirit with Christ's guidance through the hearts of the church's ministers. Wherever you minister and to whomever you minister, may grace overflow to those who thirst for what the Spirit has to offer through you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your reminders of grace through the principles of generosity, encouragement, freedom, and forgiveness. Your Son modeled all these qualities so well. Help me to follow His lead and display His grace to those to whom I minister. In His gracious name I pray, amen.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY THIRTEEN

A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures

My counsel is this: operate in grace, and in your marriage, you will experience mutual equality, mutual dignity, mutual humility, with a mutual destiny. What a pleasure that will be!

—Charles R. Swindoll

IN ancient times, oils processed from olives and herbs were applied to skin as a healing balm and refined as medicine or costly perfume. Today, we use oils in similar ways: in ointments to soothe sunburned skin and lotions to return suppleness to dry hands. We massage oil into achy muscles to ease pain or pour drops of purified oils into diffusers to fill the air with revitalizing scents. In industry, oil lessens friction in machinery and keeps the gears humming.

Grace in a marriage relationship is like oil in many ways. It reduces relational friction, heals hurt feelings, and restores vitality during an emotionally dry spell. Apologizing to our spouse after making a cutting comment is like applying soothing ointment to a wound. We massage the oil of grace into our marriage when we listen attentively as our spouse shares deep feelings or offer encouragement when our spouse needs a lift. The variety of applications of the oil of grace in marriage is limitless and so are the benefits!

Three New Testament passages describe common areas in marriage that need the restorative and healing properties of grace. These passages outline the three Rs of marriage: *realities*, *responsibilities*, and *roles*.¹



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A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The psalmist described harmony in a relationship as “precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron’s head” and flowed down his beard to the bottom of his priestly robe (Psalm 133:2). If you’re married, are you experiencing precious harmony? Or has disharmony filled your home? Perhaps you feel tension with your spouse or a hurt that won’t heal. If so, ask the Lord to anoint every aspect of your relationship with the oil of grace—from top to bottom! Pause for a moment of prayer as you prepare your heart to study God’s Word.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In the first passage, we’ll *observe* the benefits of grace regarding three realities of married life. In the second passage, we’ll *interpret* Paul’s instructions regarding the responsibilities specific to wives and to husbands. And in the third, we’ll *correlate* what we learned from the first two passages with Paul’s description of the feminine role of wives and the masculine role of husbands.



Observation: The Grace to Face Marital Realities

In [1 Corinthians 7:3–5](#), Paul used phrases such as “should fulfill,” “gives authority,” and “do not deprive.” To what aspect of marital life was Paul referring? And what were Paul’s instructions?

As you look closer at these verses, do you observe the theme of *mutuality*? Paul instructed husbands and wives to treat each other with mutual respect, dignity, and love. What attitude was Paul encouraging?



A Marriage Oiled by Grace

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This attitude applies not just to sexuality but all areas of marriage and points to the first marital reality: *marriage requires mutual unselfishness*.

Read [1 Corinthians 7:10–13](#) to discover a second reality. Notice the repetition of the phrase “must not.” Write down each time Paul used that phrase and the instructions he was giving.

Paul’s instructions highlighted the reality that *marriage is a lifelong commitment*. Paul’s counsel in these verses couldn’t be more emphatic. No less than four times does he underscore the permanency of a marriage relationship. Separation and divorce are heartbreaking, and God’s Word does address these issues in more detail. If you wish to read more, we recommend Chuck’s booklet [Divorce and Remarriage According to Jesus](#), which can be purchased online.

A third reality pops off the page as we read [1 Corinthians 7:26–28](#). In the last sentence of 7:28, what stands out as a reality about which Paul reminded his married readers?

The reality is that *marriage includes times of trouble*. Misunderstandings, financial hardship, in-law disputes, loss of employment, illness, and all sorts of misfortunes can capsize a marriage without grace at the helm.

It takes grace! Grace to accept. Grace to forgive. Grace to respect. Grace to understand. Grace to affirm. Grace to restrain. Grace to give and take with gratitude. I don’t know how many times Cynthia’s just taken my hand, looked me in the eye, and said, “Honey, we’ll make it through.” That took grace. —Chuck Swindoll



A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures



Interpretation: The Grace to Accept Personal Responsibilities

Now, let's interpret Paul's instructions on marriage in Ephesians 5:21–30 to discover the husbands' and wives' responsibilities. Paul laid the groundwork for his instructions with this foundational command: “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

A Principle for Wives

Upon this basis of mutual submission, Paul instructed wives,

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:22–24)

The relationship between Christ and His church sets the pattern for a wife's relationship to her husband. In what ways, according to Paul?

Out of a woman's heart of devotion to her Savior and her confidence in Him flows her respectful devotion to her husband. A wife fulfills her responsibility when she *knows herself so well and respects herself so much that she gives herself to her husband without hesitation*. Such submission is possible only in a relationship of security and trust—which husbands cultivate when they fulfill *their* responsibility.

A Principle for Husbands

Paul instructed husbands,

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. . . . In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. (Ephesians 5:25–26, 28)



A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures

In what ways did Paul teach husbands to follow the example of Christ?

A husband fulfills his responsibility in marriage when he *loves the Lord so deeply and likes himself so completely that he is able to give himself to his wife without conditions*. Grace takes the “ifs” out of a husband’s love. He doesn’t say to his wife, “If you give me what I want or do what I say, then I’ll love you.” No, a husband who has experienced the grace of Jesus loves his wife with an equal measure of grace, unconditionally and sacrificially, just like the One who “gave up his life for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

How did Paul summarize the responsibilities of wives and husbands in [Ephesians 5:33](#)?

The more spouses embody the grace of God, the more secure wives feel to respect their husbands and the more confident husbands feel to love their wives. We submit without feeling threatened and lead without abusing authority. Grace oils the gears of authority and submission so they work together with ease.



Correlation: The Grace to Fulfill Distinct Roles

Husbands and wives express their responsibilities through their masculine and feminine roles. Although these distinctions tend to blur in our culture, Scripture brings them into sharp focus.



A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures

The Wife's Role

How did Peter tell women to express their role in a difficult marriage with men who are not believers, and how might their behavior touch their husbands' hearts (*1 Peter 3:1–4*)?

The wife's role is to model true femininity with character traits that are precious to God and impressive to her husband.

The Husband's Role

Regarding husbands, what did Peter say about how to love their wives (*1 Peter 3:7*)?

Peter's words could be translated, "live with your wife according to knowledge." He urged men, "Really get to know your wife—her hurts and fears, hidden talents, and deepest joys. Use your strength as a man to honor, nourish, and cherish her." We summarize the husband's role this way: *to provide genuine masculinity through unselfish and sensitive leadership that strengthens the home and gives dignity to his wife.*

The better acquainted I become with the grace of God, the less I care about authority, and the less threatened I am. The more I experience the grace of God, the more I want to affirm and release my wife and the less I want to dominate and control her. Grace gives room for my wife to grow, to be, to discover, and to create. —Chuck Swindoll



A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures



Application: Equal Partners in God's Gift of New Life

Peter's concluding insight wraps up our study: spouses are "equal partner[s] in God's gift of new life" (1 Peter 3:7). How can you practically translate into your relationship each thought in this phrase?

How can you express mutual equality: "equal"?

How can you express mutual dignity: "partners"?

How can you express mutual spirituality: "God's gift of new life"?

Think back on your opening prayer for harmony in your home. Review the principles in the passages we studied and draw out one thought that you can put into practice this week. How can you apply the oil of grace in this one area of your marriage?



A Marriage Oiled by Grace

Selected Scriptures

Only by God's grace can we experience harmony in our homes. Grace is the lubricant that lessens the friction and keeps the gears of our relationships running smoothly. Grace is the ointment that restores vitality and promotes healing. Apply a little grace to your marriage today . . . and every day!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I commit to You my life and my marriage. If anything is missing, Lord, open my eyes so I can see what I must do to bring harmony into my home. I truly desire Your grace, both for my soul and my relationships. Help me be less selfish, more humble, and more committed to You and my spouse. I pray in the name of Jesus, who is my example for living, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. This study is about grace in marriage, but the principles may be applied to any interpersonal relationship. If you are single, think about relationships with close friends or family members as you study the passages and answer the questions. You may use the applications to help others in their marriage or file them away for your own future marriage.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY FOURTEEN

The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15

Once you truly get a taste of grace, you will develop an appetite for giving. You really won't need another message on it. It will have captured your heart.

—Charles R. Swindoll

GRACE and giving go hand in hand. We might even say that giving is grace with an *outstretched hand*. Think of the ways God stretched out His gracious hand to us. He gave us His only Son to bear the penalty for our sin. He forgave us, bestowed eternal life, gave us the Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance in heaven, and “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:3).

God keeps on pouring His bountiful gifts from heaven to earth like the mighty Niagara Falls pours water out of Lake Erie into Lake Ontario . . . and He doesn't expect us to pay Him back. How could we? We couldn't give back to God anything equal to His blessings any more than we could reverse Niagara's flow. No, God's gifts of grace are free, and He gives them with joy!

We may not be able to give *what* God gives, but we can give *like* He gives—with hearts of joy. When we give out of obligation motivated by guilt, our giving is mechanical and cheerless. However, once God's style of giving gets into our bloodstream, we develop an appetite for giving, even an addiction. The joy from giving propels us to give more!

As we'll learn in this study, our hearts reflect God's heart when we give with joy, and He takes special notice. As Paul wrote, “God loves a person who gives cheerfully” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Let's look closer at this verse and Paul's teaching about giving with joy in 2 Corinthians 8–9.



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The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Would you like to experience such joy? Open your heart in prayer and ask the Lord to pour into you His cheerfulness so that His Spirit flows through you when you give. Jesus invited us to pray for joy:

“I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name. You haven’t done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy.” (John 16:23–24).

Use the space below to write your prayer.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we’ll make four observations about the joy of giving from Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:6. Then we’ll uncover four principles about giving as we interpret Paul’s words in 9:7–14. Finally, we’ll join Paul in praise in 9:15, as he lifts our gaze to the greatest of all grace gifts, Jesus.



Observation: What Makes Giving so Addictive?

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, in part, to urge the believers in Corinth to send aid to their Christian brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. The mother church in Jerusalem had fallen on hard times, and the Jewish Christians there were in desperate need. When the wealthy Corinthians who lived in southern Greece, also called Achaia, first heard of the need in Jerusalem, they promised to open wide their purses when Paul’s envoys arrived to take a collection. In 2 Corinthians 8–9, Paul reminded them to fulfill their pledge.



The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15

An Example of Giving with Joy

To inspire liberality, Paul recounted the generosity of the impoverished Christians in Macedonia, who contributed not out of their surplus but out of their lack. To locate Macedonia, Corinth, and Jerusalem, refer to the maps in your Bible. Or go to the “*Paul’s Missionary Journeys*” map on the Insight for Living Ministries website. Notice the distance Paul and his team would have to journey under perilous conditions to deliver the collection to Jerusalem. What city names in Macedonia do you recognize from Paul’s other books in the New Testament?

With these locations in mind, read *2 Corinthians 8:1–5*. Write down the statements that describe the poverty of the Macedonian believers in contrast to their openhanded, joyful generosity.

How could these suffering believers give with such joy? Before they gave their money, “their first action was to give themselves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5). Their devotion to the Giver of all grace overflowed in their giving grace to others. They begged Paul “again and again for the *privilege* of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem” (8:4, emphasis added).

“They first gave themselves to the Lord.” You see, that’s it! That’s where grace resides. Not in a wallet. Not in an income. Grace resides in the heart. And it touches the poor as well as the rich. If there’s grace, there will be generosity. —Chuck Swindoll



The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15

Reasons to Give with Joy

Paul was making the argument that if the impoverished Macedonian believers could give with joy, then so could the wealthy Corinthian believers. But why should they? Why is giving with joy so important in a believer's walk of faith? Paul offered four reasons.

Notice the first reason in 2 Corinthians 8:7. Alongside what virtues did Paul list giving?

To Paul, generosity was just as central as faith, knowledge, and love . . . and, in fact, it helps us *keep a healthy balance* so that we don't just accumulate blessings, we give them as well. Generosity is the litmus test of the genuineness of our love (2 Corinthians 8:8).

Can you find another reason in 2 Corinthians 8:9? What do you observe?

When we give with joy, we *model the same grace as Jesus Christ* who offered Himself not out of obligation but joy (Hebrews 12:2). By giving with grace, we more closely emulate the generous grace of the Savior.

Look closely for the third reason in 2 Corinthians 9:1–5, particularly verse 5. What pitfall was Paul hoping their generosity would help them avoid?



The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15

Paul stoked the fire of the Corinthians' desire to give because he worried that greed might have snuffed out their enthusiasm. From this we observe that *generosity counteracts selfishness and covetousness*. Generosity loosens greed's grip.

Paul illustrated a fourth reason in 2 Corinthians 9:6 through an object lesson. What is the metaphor, and how does it apply to giving?

Giving prompts more giving as we receive God's blessings in return (Luke 6:38). Why should we give with joy? Because we *become increasingly more generous* the more we give, and the joy multiplies!

I believe when the heart is right, generosity comes. It's not just a matter of the economy. It's a matter of the heart. It's certainly been true in my life. My concern does not have to do with amounts or percentages, but with attitude. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What Makes Grace so Attractive?

Now let's uncover some principles for grace-based giving according to Paul's teaching. A principle is a timeless statement of truth that applies not just to the people in Paul's day but to us as well. Read 2 Corinthians 9:7–14 and write down the principle about grace and giving that you learn from the following four phrases. We've filled in the first one as an example.

"Each decide in your heart how much to give" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Grace frees us to follow the Spirit as He moves in our hearts, and we don't need to compare our giving to others. Grace individualizes our giving.

"Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure . . . [give] cheerfully" (9:7).



The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15

“God will generously provide all you need” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

“As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God” (9:13).

Grace-based giving removes the hooks of guilt and obligation that dig under our skin and make giving downright painful. It eliminates the one-size-fits-all approach that imposes a strict percentage and doesn't allow God's Spirit to move in our hearts. Grace frees us to seek divine guidance and plan our giving based on how God stirs us as individuals. In the end, God gets the glory because He is working through us. Others learn by our example. The relationship between giver and recipient deepens. Grace frees us to enjoy giving!

Wouldn't it be great if when the offering plates were passed in church we heard laughter? Why not? Deep within our hearts there is not compulsion but laughter. From the Greek word for cheerfully we get our word hilarious. God loves a hilarious giver! —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: What Makes Christ so Superlative?

In his epistles, Paul often wrote the most eloquent descriptions of God's glory. However, in this passage, Paul was at a loss for words as he contemplated God's gift of His Son. So, to conclude his thoughts on giving, Paul wrote this heartfelt line.

Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words. (2 Corinthians 9:15)



The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:3–8, 13–15

Paul found the words that escaped him in 2 Corinthians 9:15 in his prayer in [Ephesians 3:14–21](#). Read these verses as we come full circle and remember the many ways God stretched out His hand of grace to us. What strikes you personally as you consider God's gift of Jesus for you?



Application: What Can We Do to Give with Joy?

Grace and giving truly do go hand in hand. God loved us first by giving His Son, so we love others through our giving (1 John 4:19). Take a moment to look back over the observations and principles from this study. What one truth stands out as a first step forward in your giving with joy?

In the space below, write down an individualized giving plan. Pray for the Spirit to touch your heart and guide your giving. Remember, giving isn't just about money. Other types of gifts include time together, a cherished possession, words of encouragement, a meal, or any other action that meets a need. Be creative! Make giving fun!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your Son, who is too wonderful for words. Out of Your heart of love, You gave the most precious of all gifts, and I have received countless blessings beyond description. Stir in my heart a generous spirit so that I can give like You give, with love that is genuine and joy that is boundless. I pray to You the Giver in the name of Your Gift, Jesus, amen.



THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY FIFTEEN

Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

Grace does us no good if it is not accepted, if it is not received, if it is not welcomed and appropriated. Grace not only gives with generosity, it receives with humility.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WE'VE come a long way in our study of grace. In his book *The Grace Awakening*, Chuck Swindoll surveyed the territory we've covered:

Grace comes to us in two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. Vertical grace centers on our relationship with God. It is amazing. It frees us from the demands and condemnation of the Mosaic Law. It announces hope to the sinner—the gift of eternal life, along with all its benefits. Horizontal grace centers on our human relationships. It is charming. It frees us from the tyranny of pleasing people and adjusting our lives to the demands and expectations of human opinion. It gives relief—the enjoyment of freedom along with all its benefits.¹

What are the benefits of a grace-awakened life? We appreciate more fully God's gifts of salvation, forgiveness, and unconditional love. Grace frees us from judging others and from the judgments of others. We accept others more and criticize less. We stop demanding that people live by our lists of rules and, conversely, stop trying to measure up to their lists. Grace liberates us from our old master sin to serve God. It frees us to follow the Spirit as He leads us. The goal of grace is to help us become more like Christ as we love others as He loves us.

Has grace awakened in your life? If so, we celebrate your progress! But we're not through. The final leg of the journey is the lifelong practice of daily receiving God's grace.



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Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

Accepting grace may be difficult for do-it-yourself folks who resist receiving help from anyone. The words, *I need help*, can be hard to say—but how empowering these words can be when God fills us with His grace! In this study, we'll examine four Bible characters—two who resisted grace and two who received it—and we'll learn pitfalls to avoid and principles to follow in letting grace into our lives.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Moses resisted grace, but **Samson** received it in his final moment. **Peter** resisted grace, but **Paul** received it and lived in grace every moment. As you prepare to study these men's lives, reflect on your responses to grace. Resistance can present itself in imperceptible ways. Ask the Lord to reveal how you may be resisting grace without knowing it. And then ask Him to help you receive His grace, depend on Him in every endeavor and relationship, and even accept the grace of others.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We begin with the account of Moses, who was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and grew up in Pharaoh's household. At age 40, he rashly killed an Egyptian to defend a fellow Hebrew and fled for his life to the desert in Midian (Exodus 2:11–15). Exodus 3 opens with Moses at eighty years old, tending sheep in a remote wilderness. It was a place of obscurity and loneliness—a fitting exile for a man bearing the shame of past failure. One day, in his wandering, Moses came to Sinai, “the mountain of God” (3:1) where he happened upon a bush ablaze. In the fire of this bush that would not burn up, God appeared to Moses to purge his past and light his way to a new future. How did Moses respond to God's gracious offer of a new beginning?



Observation: Examples of Resisting and Accepting Grace

Let's use the *Searching the Scriptures* skill of observation to follow the dialogue between God and Moses, noting Moses' objections and God's responses.



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

Moses Resisted Grace

Take a few minutes to read the entire interaction in [Exodus 3:1–4:17](#). Then fill in the sections of the following chart, which summarizes the ways Moses resisted God's plan and how God responded to him. The dialogue began with God, in His grace, calling Moses by name and giving him a second chance to deliver the Hebrews—this time, not in Moses' strength but in God's. The Lord said to Moses, "Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).

Verses	Moses' Resistance	Verses	God's Response
Exodus 3:11		Exodus 3:12	
Exodus 3:13		Exodus 3:14–15	
Exodus 4:1		Exodus 4:2–9	
Exodus 4:10		Exodus 4:11–12	
Exodus 4:13		Exodus 4:14–17	



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

God countered Moses' every fear with divine assurance, but still Moses was reluctant. In the interpretation phase of our study, we'll come back to Moses to understand why he resisted God's grace. For now, let's leave him trembling at the burning bush and fast-forward from Israel's bondage in Egypt to the days of the judges and the final scene of Samson's life.

Samson Accepted Grace

Enamored by Delilah's charms, Samson revealed to her that his secret source of strength was his Nazarite vow to never cut his hair (Judges 16:17). When the Philistines shaved his head, Samson's vow was broken and his herculean strength vanished. They bound him in bronze chains, gouged out his eyes, and threw him in prison (16:21)—a sobering illustration of Proverbs 5:22–23:

*An evil man is held captive by his own sins;
they are ropes that catch and hold him.
He will die for lack of self-control;
he will be lost because of his great foolishness.*

Though Samson reaped what he had sown, God's grace proved even more abundant than Samson's moral failure. Read [Judges 16:28–30](#) and write down evidence of Samson's humility and dependence on God who, in His grace, gave disgraced Samson a final heroic act.

While Moses resisted God's grace at the burning bush, Samson cried out to God with his last breath and received power. Now let's visit two Bible characters in the New Testament who resisted and received grace.

Peter Resisted Grace

In the upper room, Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover before Jesus was arrested. God's Lamb would be slain for the sins of the world. At a poignant moment, Jesus donned a servant's towel to demonstrate His love.



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

Read [John 13:1–8](#). What did Jesus do to show grace? And how did Peter resist?

You may recall in our first study in this series, we noted that the Hebrew term for grace, *chen*, means “to bend or stoop.” A superior may show kindness and favor by stooping to an inferior’s level—which is exactly what Jesus did when He bent down to wash the disciples’ feet. Yet, Peter refused to put his feet in his master’s basin. Why? Before answering, let’s turn to our final example, Paul.

Paul Accepted Grace

Paul had much to boast about. In Judaism’s galaxy of religious celebrities, Paul was one of the brightest stars. Read Paul’s pedigree and list of accomplishments in [Philippians 3:5–6](#). What do you observe in Paul’s description of himself?

In the mirror of religion, Paul saw himself as a righteous man. But then Paul met Jesus and realized how sinful he was and how much he needed God’s grace. Read [Philippians 3:7–14](#). In whom did Paul place his confidence? And on what guiding principle did Paul base his life?



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

Paul no longer counted on earning his forgiveness through his own righteousness but on the atoning work of Jesus. Receiving God's forgiveness set Paul on a journey of daily dependence on God and a lifelong mission of sharing God's grace with others.

You know the last person on earth we forgive? Ourselves. We can forgive an enemy quicker than we will forgive ourselves. Here's the point. Not until we have fully accepted the forgiveness of God will we be ready to receive His grace . . . because that is the first place grace is received, through forgiveness.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What It Takes to Let Grace In

Now let's dig deeper into each of this study's examples to uncover gems of truth that we can apply. Each man had to scale a barrier that stood between him and grace. **Moses** and **Peter** struggled to surmount their walls.

Reflect on the dialogue you read in Exodus 3 and 4 between Moses and God. What do you think was standing in Moses' way ([Exodus 3:11; 4:10](#))?

Now reflect on Peter's dialogue with Jesus. What do you think kept Peter from receiving grace ([John 13:8](#))?

Now, consider **Samson** and **Paul**. They did break through their barriers to receive grace. What stood in Samson's way that he managed to overcome ([Judges 16:28](#))?



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

And what breakthrough did Paul make as he accepted grace (*Philippians 3:3–9*)?

What barriers must we move past to accept grace? Just as with these men, fear, failure, guilt, expectations, pride, self-righteousness, and other problems may dam up the flow of grace. As Chuck reflected on these men's lives, he made the following conclusions.

- Moses resisted grace because his guilt was not sufficiently dealt with.
- Samson accepted grace because his expectations had been erased.
- Peter resisted grace because his pride was still paramount.
- Paul accepted grace when he no longer put confidence in the flesh.

With which of these men do you most identify?



Correlation: Where Do You Place Your Confidence?

As we draw our study to a close, consider Paul's example as a summary of the key steps in receiving grace. Read closely the following lines from Paul's letter to the Philippians to center your focus on the One who is the source of all grace.

We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.
(Philippians 3:3)



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. (Philippians 3:9)

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. (3:10)

Put Paul's thoughts in your own words and make his passion for Christ your own.



Application: How Can We Accept and Abide in Grace?

God saves us by grace so that we can live in grace. Put another way, the vertical dimension of grace opens the door to the horizontal dimension. Our salvation ushers us into a grace-based lifestyle that radically changes every aspect of our identity and relationships.

What must we do to oil the hinges and swing open the door to a more vibrant experience of grace?

- First, it takes an admission of our *humanity*. We admit that we're only human and we can't drag ourselves up to God no matter how hard we pull on our own bootstraps.
- Second, it takes an attitude of *humility*. Nothing is so welcomed by grace than true humility, which is simply realizing our need and grasping Christ's outstretched hand.

Has the Lord revealed to you any imperceptible barriers that keep you from receiving God's grace? If so, what are those barriers? And what would it be like for you if you placed your confidence completely in Him in a challenging area of your life?



Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture

Could God be reaching out to you through a person? Have you been resisting the Lord's prompting to receive grace from a certain individual who has been offering you help? If so, what is the situation, and how can you accept God's grace through this person?

What a journey our study of grace has been! We conclude with Chuck's words of encouragement from his book *The Grace Awakening*:

What a wonderful future God has for people who accept grace. It is almost too good to be true. When George MacDonald, the great Scottish preacher, was talking with his son about the glories of the future, his little boy interrupted and said, "It seems too good to be true, Daddy." A smile spread across MacDonald's whiskered face as he answered back, "Nay, lad-die, it is just so good it must be true!"

It is in accepting grace that we can begin to model amazing grace. Only then do we realize how good grace really is.²



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You have extended Your hand of grace to me on many occasions. Sometimes I have resisted Your offer, thinking foolishly that I could manage on my own. But now, I grasp Your hand with a commitment that I will keep holding as You lead me by Your grace and with Your power every day of my life, from this day forward! Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 139.
2. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, 275.



THE GRACE AWAKENING

STUDY FIFTEEN

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Grace: It's Really Accepting!

Selected Scripture



Tools for Digging Deeper



The Grace Awakening
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



The Grace Awakening
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hardcover book



It's Time to Embrace Grace
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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