

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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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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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.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

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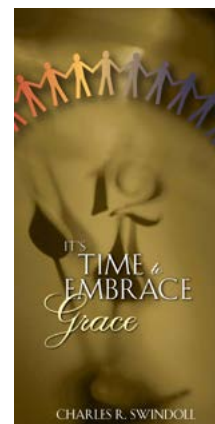
Tools for Digging Deeper



The Grace Awakening
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



The Grace Awakening
by Charles R. Swindoll
hardcover book



It's Time to Embrace Grace
by Charles R. Swindoll
booklet

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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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