

THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY ELEVEN

Bringing Grace Up Close *Selected Scriptures*

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

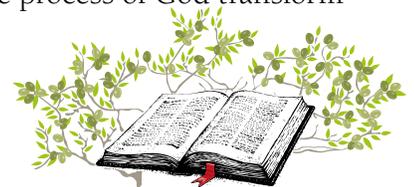
—Charles R. Swindoll

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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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.



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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



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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](#))?



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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>



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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?



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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.



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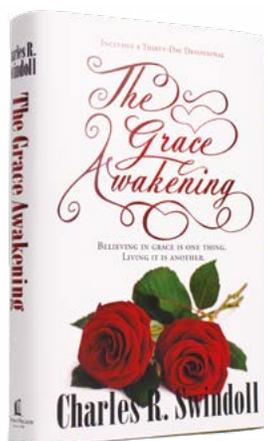
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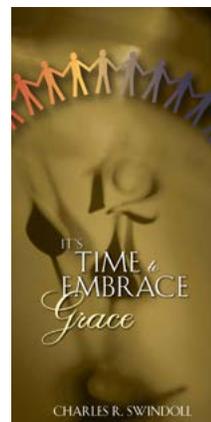
Tools for Digging Deeper



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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