

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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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.



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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
<i>Exodus 3:11</i>		<i>Exodus 3:12</i>	
<i>Exodus 3:13</i>		<i>Exodus 3:14–15</i>	
<i>Exodus 4:1</i>		<i>Exodus 4:2–9</i>	
<i>Exodus 4:10</i>		<i>Exodus 4:11–12</i>	
<i>Exodus 4:13</i>		<i>Exodus 4:14–17</i>	



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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.



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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?



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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*)?



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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)



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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?



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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.



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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
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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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