



The ESSENTIAL GUIDE
for a GOD-HONORING *Life*

The
OWNER'S
MANUAL
for
CHRISTIANS



CHARLES R.
SWINDOLL



NOW INCLUDES STUDY GUIDE

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

The Owner's Manual for Christians

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Study Guide

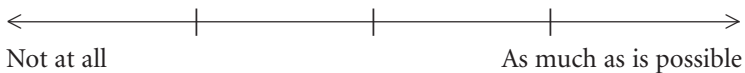
Chapter 1—Grace

“If there is any singular truth that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, all other systems of belief, it is *grace*.”

1. Define *grace* in your own words.
2. “To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn’t deserve it and can never earn it.” Why is it so difficult for us to accept something we do not deserve?
3. Which of the following “grace killers” affect your spiritual vitality?

 ___ spoken words ___ written words ___ arrogance
 ___ manipulation ___ intolerance ___ judgmental attitudes
 ___ bullying ___ intimidation ___ narrow-mindedness
4. How does your experiencing these “grace killers” affect your freedom, spontaneity, and creativity?
5. There are four practical expectations you can anticipate as you get a firm grasp on grace. Describe how the realization of each of these expectations might affect your spiritual health.
 - You can expect to gain a greater appreciation for God’s gifts to you and others.

- You can expect to spend less time and energy being critical of and concerned about others' choices.
 - You can expect to become more tolerant and less judgmental.
 - You can expect to take a giant step toward maturity.
6. Read 1 Corinthians 15:9–11 and then rewrite the passage from your own perspective.
7. After rewriting the passage, describe how your understanding of grace is changing.
8. Complete the following statements:
 - Because God does what He does by His grace, I will . . .
 - Because I am what I am by the grace of God, I will . . .
 - Because grace must be demonstrated in my attitudes and actions toward others, I will . . .
9. What is the difference between living by rules and living under grace?
10. Mark on the continuum below the degree to which you are experiencing God's grace today.



11. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 2—Love

“Love is a universal language. When expressed authentically, no words are necessary. Furthermore, love is no less essential to human life than air, food, or water.”

- 1. One of the greatest descriptions of the priority of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Read verses 1–3 and describe how these verses compare to the priority you place on love.
- 2. *Agape* is the kind of love we experience with God. *The Nelson Study Bible* says, “True love puts up with people who would be easier to give up on.” Describe a time when you have either given up on someone or been given up on by someone.
- 3. How would real *agape* love have changed the situation described above?
- 4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 and mark the characteristics of authentic love. Then, use the activity below to rate yourself in each characteristic.

	False										True									
I am patient and kind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I am not jealous.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I am not arrogant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I am not prideful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I am not rude.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I am not self-seeking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I am not easily angered.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I don’t keep records of wrongs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I do not delight in evil.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
I rejoice in truth.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										

Total the numbers you circled and write the total. The maximum score is 100. Based on an academic grading scale, how did you do on the “love test”?

5. Love isn't something we do; it's who we are as believers. When we have *agape* love, we will be more concerned with serving and helping than with inflating ourselves. This kind of love isn't arrogant. Think about your most recent expression of love. Was it more focused on what you received in return or on meeting the needs of someone else? Explain.
6. "Agape is the intersection of truth, salvation, and obedience to God." How does your love for other people affect their relationship with the Lord?
7. Have your words or actions toward another person ever interfered with his or her ability to see God for who He really is? If so, what would you do differently today?
8. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 3—Joy

"Visit most congregations today and search for signs of happiness and sounds of laughter and you often come away disappointed."

1. Which of the following statements is most often true of you?

___ My joy overwhelms my circumstances.
___ My circumstances overwhelm my joy.
2. What does your response say about the presence of God's joy in your life?
3. I would laugh more if only:

4. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28. Paul had more than enough reasons to give up and let his circumstances interrupt the work of God in and through his life. What kept Paul from giving up?
5. If you faced one or more of the circumstances Paul faced, would you be able to keep moving forward, or would you give up? Explain your response.
6. Paul was able to maintain his joy because he spent more time focused on God's strength than on his personal weakness. Because Paul was genuinely joyful, his joy was contagious. What attitude is most prevalent in your life?
7. What would happen if those around you “caught” your most prevalent attitude? Would their lives be made better or worse? Explain your response.
8. “Joyful people stay riveted to the present—the here and now, not the then and never.” Are you more focused on what God is doing in your life or on things you did in the past?
9. How is your focus affecting the joy that should be flowing through your life and into the lives of others?
10. Read John 15:11. God's presence in our lives is accompanied by the joy that is part of His character. If your daily joy is a reflection of God's presence in your life, what would people who know you conclude about your relationship with God?
11. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 4—Fellowship and Friendship

“In spite of our high-tech world and efficient procedures, people remain the essential ingredient of life. When we forget that, a strange thing happens: we start treating people like inconveniences instead of assets.”

- 1. Based on the quality of your relationships with other people, would you say that you view people as assets or inconveniences?
- 2. You probably are where you are today because of the influence of certain people. Take a moment to list some of those people and recount briefly how each influenced you.
- 3. Paul’s life was made richer and more enjoyable through the presence of special friends—Luke, Timothy, Barnabas, Silas, Epaphroditus, and others. Each person was helpful to Paul, but the relationships were reciprocal—Paul made a difference in their lives too. In whose life are you making a difference? Describe the difference you are making.
- 4. Read Philippians 2:19–24. The relationship between Paul and Timothy was strong because of three foundational characteristics—they shared a similar vision, they had a mutual concern for others, and they had servant hearts. Consider your closest relationship and evaluate the strength of each characteristic.

	Weak										Strong									
We share a similar vision.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
We are concerned about others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
We have servant hearts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										

Add the numbers circled and write the total. Your score will range from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 30. If you scored 0-10, your best relationship is weak. If you scored 11–20, your relationship is neutral. And 21-30 means your relationship is strong. Based on your

score, how can your relationship be strengthened in each of the three characteristics?

5. In this chapter, we looked at three kinds of relationships that deserve our attention. Consider the brief description of each and identify a person in your life who fits the description. If you don't have someone who fits, begin praying that God will make you aware of the people He wants you to relate to.

- Timothy is the person with whom we naturally connect. Who is your "Timothy"?
- Epaphroditus is a person who comes to your rescue. Who is your "Epaphroditus"?
- Jesus Christ is the One who offers salvation and can change your inner heart. Without Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus won't do you much good. Describe the quality of your relationship with Jesus.

6. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 5—God's Will

"But God offers a better way to live—one that requires faith as it lifts us above the drag and grind of our immediate little world, opens new dimensions of thought, and introduces a perspective without human limitations."

1. Read Isaiah 4:9, 12–13. Summarize those verses.
2. Since God is eternally consistent (2 Timothy 2:13), He cannot contradict His own nature. Therefore, He can't cause us to sin, He won't cause us to be dishonest, He wouldn't encourage us to compromise our integrity to accomplish His plan, and so forth. What is your strategy for knowing God's decreed will? Where do you find it, and how much time do you spend studying it?

3. "No one is ultimately able to frustrate God's plan." What, then, are the consequences of a believer failing to do what God intended him or her to do?
4. Describe a time when you missed out on God's blessings because you failed to get involved in God's activity around you.
5. How did that experience make you feel? What was the effect of the experience on your relationship with God?
6. How would you describe God's permissive will?
7. Which of the following are optional for believers?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual morality | <input type="checkbox"/> Be joyful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer | <input type="checkbox"/> Submit to God's desires |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Live according to God's ways | <input type="checkbox"/> Love |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obey your parents | <input type="checkbox"/> Marry a Christian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Proclaim Christ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship | <input type="checkbox"/> Give |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be grateful | <input type="checkbox"/> Have no prejudice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Godly values | <input type="checkbox"/> Meditate on Scripture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support your family | <input type="checkbox"/> Be holy |

8. "The better you get to know the Word of God, the less confusing is the will of God." Based on your knowledge of the Word of God, how would you describe your knowledge of the will of God?

- ☐ I know God's Word thoroughly and am living out God's will.
- ☐ I need to spend more time in God's Word.
- ☐ I am making up the rules as I go along. I do whatever I want and God understands.

9. Match the following prerequisites for doing the will of God with the correct scripture passage:

1. ____ You must be a Christian.
2. ____ You must be wise.
3. ____ You must want to do God's will.
4. ____ You must be willing to pray and wait.
5. ____ You must be willing to give up your creature comforts.
 - a. John 7:17
 - b. Acts 20:22–24
 - c. Romans 8:14
 - d. Matthew 7:7–8
 - e. Ephesians 5:15–16

10. What makes risk so difficult for you?

11. Are you willing to make a major change in your life—assuming that it's the Lord's will?

12. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 6—Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives

“Your spiritual life may be in need of some major changes. A new perspective is essential in order to rekindle that first-love kind of relationship where God is real again, where you and He are on much closer speaking terms.”

1. Read Revelation 2:2–5. If Jesus wrote a personal letter to you about your spiritual vitality, what would He say?
2. “God will never adjust His agenda to fit ours.” Reflect on your daily life. In what ways do you sometimes choose your agenda over God's?

3. How do you define the word *discipline*? Paul told Timothy to discipline himself “for the purpose of godliness.” When it comes to pursuing godliness, how would you characterize your pursuit?

___ I hope godliness is pursuing me.

___ I pursue godliness, but it’s not the most important thing in my life.

___ Godliness is my most passionate pursuit.

4. When you face difficulties in life, do you first turn to your own knowledge or to God’s wisdom? Explain your response.

5. “Discipline is training that corrects and perfects our mental faculties or molds our moral character.” Consider each of the following activities and place a + by it if it contributes to the process described in the statement above or a – by it if it interferes with the process.

___ closest friendships

___ worship

___ small group

___ television

___ radio

___ music

___ Internet

___ hobbies

___ recreation

___ books

___ magazines

___ conversation

___ coworkers

___ neighbors

___ social activities

6. What are some immediate changes you should make so that you are pursuing a more intimate relationship with God?

7. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 7—Prayer: Calling Out

“A primary purpose of prayer is connecting with God in order to transfer His will into your life. It’s collaborating with God to accomplish His goals.”

1. Prayer must be God-centered, never self-centered. Think about your prayer life. What percentage of the time you spend in prayer focuses on you?
2. “God never hides His will. If we seek direction, He delights in providing it.” About what are you praying right now?
3. What do you think is keeping you from hearing God’s direction for your life?
4. Based on the way you pray, are you more focused on convincing God to do something you want or positioning yourself to do what God wants? Explain your response.
5. Read 1 Timothy 2:1–2. List some of the people for whom you should be praying.
6. Describe a time when God answered one of your prayers. How did you know God was responding?
7. Worry drains our energy and saps our spiritual vitality. Worry is a natural response to life’s everyday concerns. Read Matthew 6:27. What was Jesus’ advice regarding worry?
8. What happens to your prayer life when you are preoccupied with other concerns?
9. Use the words “nothing” and “everything” to complete the following statement: Worry about _____; pray about _____. Is this statement true or false in regard to the way you live?
10. Worry and prayer are opposite sides of the same coin. When you do one, you can’t do the other. Our default response to life is worry. How can you replace worry with prayer?

11. The result of prayer is inexplicable peace. How would you describe your peacefulness right now?

___ I have no peace.

___ I am at peace when I'm asleep.

___ I experience more peace than anxiety.

___ I am experiencing God's peace to its fullest.

12. "Prayer is never a substitute for human responsibility." What are some things God might expect you to do in addition to praying for people and/or situations?

13. God promises He will hear us, He will be with us, and He will keep us at peace. Write a prayer expressing your gratitude for these three truths.

14. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 8—Humility: Bowing Low

"True humility comes from a place of strength and inner security. Humble people are fully aware of their gifts, their training, their experience, and all the attributes that make them successful at what they do. That security—that honest, healthy self-assessment—results in more than a humble constitution; it translates into actions that can be observed, actions that we will want to emulate."

1. What desires or aspirations compete with your desire for real humility?
2. True humility is the result of an intimate relationship with God. What does your humility say about the depth of your relationship with God? (See next page.)

___ I struggle with humility because my relationship with God isn't very strong.

___ Though I'm not there yet, I am growing in my relationship with God and in humility.

___ I believe real humility is unrealistic in today's world.

3. "We appreciate humility in others but rarely want it for ourselves." Is this true in your life? Explain your response.

4. What is the difference between humility and having low self-esteem? Which term best describes your attitude?

5. We discussed three biblical examples of humility. Which of these stories spoke most directly to you, and what did God say to you through it?

6. Because Mark 10 teaches that "we need to sit on promoting ourselves," I will . . .

7. Because Philippians 2 teaches that "we need to stand up for others," I will . . .

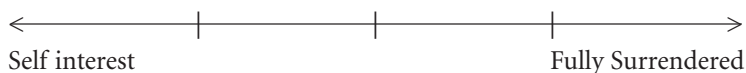
8. Because 1 Peter 5 teaches that "we need to bow low before our God," I will . . .

9. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 9—Surrender: Releasing Our Grip

"Paul tells us it is required of a steward that he be found *faithful*—not necessarily fruitful or full of charisma or excited or brimming with optimism, but faithful."

1. Read Hebrews 12:1. This verse calls attention to two things that interfere with a believer's spiritual vitality. What slows you down and keeps you from giving your best to those things that God says are important to Him?
2. What is your *signature sin*—the sin that seems to be more prevalent and easier to rationalize?
3. What is the connection between your signature sin and your pursuit of God's best?
4. Read Philippians 3:10 on page 118. Place an X on the line indicating where you are right now.



Now place an O on the line indicating where you want to be. What must you release to reach that goal?

5. Hebrews 12:2 says that believers must study Christ. Is your Bible study time more focused on information or transformation? Explain your response.
6. Hebrews 12:3 instructs us to compare ourselves to Christ. What will happen to your conversations, entertainment, social activities, schedule, worship, and so forth when you compare yourself to Christ?
7. Complete the following statements:
 - I agree that I must surrender my possessions, therefore I will:
 - I agree that I must surrender my position, therefore I will:
 - I agree that I must surrender my plans, therefore I will:
 - I agree that I must surrender my people, therefore I will:

8. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 10—Self-Control: Holding Back

“We have all exceeded the bounds of wisdom by failing to restrain ourselves. We all suffer from the same ailment: lack of self-control.”

1. Read Romans 7:14-25. How does your life compare to the life Paul described?
2. Which fear most affects you—the fear of disappointing God or the fear of getting caught? Explain your response.
3. Read Galatians 5:17-21. “The flesh is a self-serving, nonbelieving, godless mind-set that lives by animal instinct. Its natural stance is facing away from God.” This is your natural tendency. How do you protect yourself against yielding to this tendency?

___ I don’t; I just assume I’ll be forgiven.

___ I resist when I’m around others who expect me to resist.

___ I know the avenues through which I am tempted and am eliminating the sources of temptation. As I grow in my relationship with God, I am sickened by the things that sicken Him.

4. Based on the way you have lived the past few days, which of the following is controlling your life? You can only choose one.

___ the Holy Spirit

___ my flesh and its desires

5. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul identified the deeds of the flesh. List the attitudes or actions that are commonplace in your life.

6. Now read Galatians 5:22–23. Which list is more appealing to you—the deeds of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit?
7. Based on your choice, what should be your attitude toward the Holy Spirit in your life?

___ I should want the Holy Spirit to control more of my life and me less of my life.
___ I should want the Holy Spirit to control less of my life and me more of my life.
8. God keeps you here for a purpose. What do you believe to be your purpose?
9. Is your daily life supporting or contradicting your purpose? Explain your response.
10. The first steps to living above the flesh are discussed. Work through the four steps and create some realistic action points that you will take to exercise better self-control.
11. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 11—Developing a Godly Moral Compass

“The Lord doesn’t expect us to barter for His favor. His love isn’t for sale.”

1. The Bible is God’s revelation of absolute truth containing God’s directives and principles. What the Bible says is right is still right; what the Bible says is wrong, is still wrong. Defining right and wrong is God’s prerogative and society has no say in the matter. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
2. Read Micah 6:8. Rewrite that verse in your own words.

3. It is vital that God's people do what is right even when it isn't popular. Describe how you determine what is right.
4. As you seek to know God's will for your life, how do you expect Him to communicate to you?
5. How much time each day do you spend listening to God through reading His Word?
6. How had God transformed your personal convictions? What is the role of your personal convictions in following God's plan for your life?
7. How would you describe the spiritual character of your closest friends and advisors? Are those to whom you listen more or less tuned into the Holy Spirit than you?
8. Based on the spiritual health of those to whom you listen, how do you expect their advice to compare to God's real desires for you?

___ I expect their advice to point me toward God's desires.
___ I expect their advice to point me away from God's desires.
9. List the people you should be listening to and how you know they are tuned into God's Spirit.
10. Reflect on the last time you made a moral choice based on your understanding of God's definition of right and wrong. How did other people respond to your decision?
11. Rate the following priorities in the order in which you use them to make moral choices:

___ popularity ___ personal desire ___ obedience to God

12. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 12—Dealing with Failure, Suffering, Temptation, and Guilt

“God has given us a purpose for our existence, a reason to go on, even though that existence includes tough times. Living through suffering, we become sanctified—in other words, set apart for the glory of God. We gain perspective. We grow deeper. We grow up!”

1. We all agree life is tough. The apostle Peter’s first letter offers us encouragement for facing the struggles that are part of our lives. Take a few moments to read 1 Peter. Describe a time when you have been mistreated because of your faith in God.
2. Why is it difficult for us to rejoice through our hard times?
3. Review the six reasons believers can rejoice through hard times. Which reason is most comforting to you, and why is that reason comforting?
4. When you face struggles, do you first respond with rejoicing or with resentment? Why?
5. Read John 17:14–15 and 1 John 2:15–17. What should be a believer’s attitude toward the world?
6. Why is this attitude so hard to maintain?
7. What most often tempts you to embrace the world’s ways?
8. How can you guard against the temptations that so easily distract you?

9. There are four techniques listed. Based on your most frequent temptations, what, specifically, should you do to implement each of the following techniques?
- Pay close attention to what you look at.
 - Give greater thought to the consequences of sin than to its pleasures.
 - Begin each day by renewing your sense of reverence for God.
 - Periodically during each day focus fully on Christ.
10. Read 1 Peter 2:11–12. How should the fact that others are watching us affect our choices?
11. Because God is for me, I will:
12. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 13—Overcoming Shame and Doubt

“The sinless Son of God took all our sins on Himself when He died on the cross. It was there He endured the shame of the world. Every wicked deed done by humanity, He took on Himself when He suffered and died in our place.”

1. Read John 8:1–11. What does this story teach about God’s attitude toward us?
2. What does this story reveal about the attitudes of the religious people of that day?
3. When it comes to dealing with the sins of other people, do you most often exhibit the attitude of God or that of the religious leaders described in this story? Explain your response.

4. We all face condemnation, much of which is self-imposed. How does self-condemnation affect the vitality of your relationship with God?
5. There are two truths that will help you deal with your personal shame. Consider each statement and write a short prayer asking God to help you keep your focus on His love for you in light of these truths.
 - Those most unqualified to condemn you, will. Prayer:
 - The One most qualified to condemn you, won't. Prayer:
6. Read Matthew 11:28–30 and write what God says to you through these verses.
7. What do you believe is the relationship between faith and doubt?
8. What should be your response to your doubts about God?
9. “Times of doubting become schoolrooms of learning, those places where a new kind of faith is forged.” What have you learned through your times of doubt?
10. Describe a time when you have risked and failed. What did you learn?
11. How does releasing things help you strengthen your faith?
12. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Chapter 14—Sacrifice: Personal and Financial

“I realized that life doesn’t revolve around me—my comfort, my desires, my dreams, my plans. Clearly, it is all about Him.”

1. Read Ephesians 5:1–2. How does this passage compare to the way you live your life?
2. We must apply the concept of sacrifice to three realms of life—personal, relational, and material. When you hear the word *sacrifice*, what thoughts first come to mind?
3. Read Matthew 6:19–33. What personal advice do you get from these verses? When it comes to meeting your needs, whom do you trust—yourself or God? Explain.
4. Read Genesis 22. What relationship principles do you see in this story?
5. “When one deals with personal and relational sacrifice, financial sacrifices naturally follow.” In which area is it easier for you to make sacrifices? Why?
6. Why are people so defensive about sacrificing financially?
7. What does your attitude toward giving say about the depth of your relationship with God?
8. Take a few moments and reflect on what God has taught you through this lesson. List the three most important things you learned and how, when applied, they will affect your daily life.

Closing—Living Free

Write your personal commitment based on the study of this book and God’s Word.