



LEARNING — TO — *embrace* BIBLE STUDY



THE SALVATION ARMY USA
Central Women



www.uscwomensministries.com/embrace/ | [#saEmbrace](https://twitter.com/saEmbrace)

How to use this study

This study can be an eight session study (meeting twice a month, for four months), in which participants come to the gatherings having completed two pages and the other meeting discuss the monthly Embrace questions.

For example:

Session one: pages 3 & 4

Session two: Embrace question discussion

Session three: pages 5 & 6

Session four: Embrace question discussion

Session five: pages 7 & 8

Session six: Embrace question discussion

Session seven: pages 9 & 10

Session eight: Embrace question discussion

Embrace Uncomfortable – by Captain Betsy Clark

2 Corinthians 12:10

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

When I hear the word embrace, I think of warm grandmother hugs and brown paper packages tied up with string, filled with all of my favorite things – like chocolate and Netflix. These are all things I am more than happy to embrace. So imagine my confusion when God asked me to embrace being uncomfortable.

When I first started hearing this from the Lord, my response was, “Really!?! Being a single officer in charge of a new corps on my own isn’t enough? Don’t I walk the line of being uncomfortable almost every day?” But as I continued to seek the Lord, I began to realize that even though to other people my ministry might seem uncomfortable, it had become a comfort to me.

I am comfortable being an officer. I am comfortable being moved from place to place. Even with new dynamics and new places and new faces, it all seems to be a part of my normal life now. I am comfortable in my devotional life and my prayer life. I just feel comfortable.

What my comfort said to me was I had stopped taking risks in my ministry. I had stopped being daring in my public pursuit of the lost and my private pursuit of God. I don’t want to say I was just going through the motions, but I think I became content with maintaining things the way they were.

God is reminding me that he hasn’t called me to comfort. He has called me to obedience and he has called me to a relentless pursuit of HIM. So even though I am comfortable with my life, shouldn’t I be willing to make it a little uncomfortable in order to have a greater, deeper experience of my Savior? Shouldn’t I be willing to shake things up a bit in my ministry to ensure that people are coming to know Christ?

I want to embrace the uncomfortable – not for the sake of simply shaking things up, but for the sake of a greater, deeper experience of God in my life and in the lives of others.

1. What uncomfortable/awkward experiences do you typically run from?

2. Is there anything in your life right now that you feel God nudging you towards?

3. Are you finding yourself resisting? If so, please share how.

4. Look in the Bible for a scripture reference about obedience or trusting the Lord and share with your group.

Embrace Freedom – by Captain Amanda Keene

Galatians 5:16-18

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

I can remember sitting in a small cubicle, behind a cloth separating the priest and myself. Confession – the time of the month that I dreaded from 3rd grade until the age of 21. I remember sitting down with a list I had written down on a piece of paper because I didn't want to forget one of my sins and have to come back the next day. I list them off to the priest, full of shame and hoping the priest didn't know it was me. Then he'd give me "penance" to do – a Hail Mary, say the rosary once, do something to help my neighbor...the list of ways to make up for my sin could go on forever. It's been about 8 years since my last confession, since I attended that church, yet I still wonder if my mind and heart sometimes cling to this way of thinking.

God is asking me to embrace a life of freedom. The truth that God's love for me isn't based on my actions, my thoughts, my appearance or anything having to do with me is a truth that is sometimes hard to believe. BUT it is refreshing to my whole being whenever I remember that and choose to live in that love. I have found myself time and time again, trying to manage my sin. I recognize sin in my life, beat myself up for it, ask for forgiveness, and then, in a sense, try to live by the law. I cut this out, or that, or deprive myself of this, or only let that into my life...I heard a speaker talk about this "pendulum swing" from living in sin to living under the law. Paul says we are free from sin AND the law! God is inviting me out of this and into a life where the Holy Spirit is leading me and maturing me in my faith – manifesting fruit in my life. I'm learning to embrace this freedom, learning to trust that God is maturing me and growing me in His way and in His time, and learning that truly, I cannot manage my own sin or earn God's grace. He gives it freely and unconditionally. What an amazing God we serve.

1. In your own words, define grace.

2. If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, did you feel free after? If so, share how. If not, please share your experience as well. (other members, don't be quick to talk or reason away someone else's experience. First listen and if the individual welcomes your feedback, then share.)

3. Look in the Bible for a scripture that describes freedom from knowing Christ and share with your group.

Embrace Relationship – by Pilar Dunning

Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it

I have learned to welcome silence in various ways throughout my life: the sudden stillness that occurs after my feisty two and a half year old goes to sleep at night; intentionally turning off talk radio during my morning commute to have just a few moments of quiet before commencing what is most assured to become a frenzied day. I have encountered periods of silence and sound at various points throughout my relationship with the Lord. Often coupled with intense feelings of closeness to the Lord, the season of sound often brings with it clarity and confirmation; this does not often occur in my life. The seasons of silence seem to last for far longer – peppered with feelings of doubt, disconnected-ness, and isolation.

During a recent routine work day, I found myself driving between offices and opted for sound instead of silence in the form of my current favorite worship album by Hillsong United: Empires. A portion of the lyrics in one of the songs seemed louder than the rest: “for your word never returns void”. I was suddenly overcome with emotion during which can best be described as an epiphany of the Lord’s work in my life during a period when I felt very alone. A thread of decisions and vulnerabilities made seemingly abruptly and impulsively were suddenly linked with the profound understand that the Lord HAS been at work in my life. Though my feelings loneliness and isolation were most prevalent, they were not going to prevail. I entered into a season of sound.

This truth of the Lord found in Isaiah 55:11 was sung into my heart and soul once again: what the Lord says will not return to him in void – the truths and purposes of the Lord will be accomplished in my life. I will achieve that for which I have been sent – even when I do not feel it.

I’m learning to embrace my relationship with the Lord through these seasons of silence and sound.

1. Have you ever had an epiphany moment like Pilar did? A moment when the Lord was trying to tell you something and you felt it and heard it? Share with your group.

2. Can you share a time when you doubted God?

3. What scripture speaks truth into your life? Take a moment to consider and then share.

Embrace His Plan – by Marcie Gothard

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Many of us have a plan of how we think our life should unfold. I don't know about you, but my life is nothing like I thought it would be. My reality hasn't always matched my expectations. Has that happened to you? Are you living your life based on a plan you have in your head? Does this plan include God? Because mine did not. Yes, I am a Christian. I went to church every Sunday, was involved with Women's Ministries and I was a youth leader in the corps. But I never consulted God about my plan. And when things didn't go according to my plan, I was left confused and hurt. It took some hard disappointments for me to realize what was missing from the equation. God. Once I began to fully trust Him, my life changed for the better. Better than I could ever imagine.

God continues to bring me to experiences, people and places I never thought I would encounter. As I look at my journey, so far God has brought me to a job I never would have considered, a city that never crossed my mind and a relationship I never thought was possible. Three of the most beautiful and best things that have happened to me, were not of my doing or making. So when people say, “God knows you better than you know yourself” it's the truth. Is my life perfect? No. But since I made the decision to follow Christ and give him control of my life He has filled it with more love, peace and joy than I ever experienced outside of my relationship with Him. If you find yourself in a place like I was, then I would encourage you to do three things:

- Give Him control
- Accept your misstates / release your plan
- Allow yourself to experience true freedom by trusting Christ

God wants what's best for us, but He will not move in our lives if we're still holding on to our version of how things should be. Sometimes, we have to get out of our own way and embrace His plan for our lives.

1. Share a time when you planned something but God turned it upside down.

2. What are your expectations of God? Of your church / corps? Are they realistic?

3. How is Jesus “counter-cultural” to our society? Use scripture to back up your answer!

Embrace Weakness – by Lt. Robyn Hubbard

2 Corinthians 12: 9

“Each time he said ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”

Weak. I feel that this is a four-letter word that no one likes to talk about. No one likes to be called weak. When someone is weak, it means that they do not have the strength to do something on their own. We live in a world that glamorizes strength in a person. Society conditions the idea that when hardship happens, it is better to keep all of our emotions inside than to show our weakness to those around us.

I hate showing people that I am weak. I like to pretend that I have my life all together, but recently in life God has pushed me to show my weakness to those around me. It is not easy to show those closest to us that we do not have life all figured out.

There was a moment in my life where it seemed that nothing was going right in life. I hated my classes in college, I was struggling with God’s calling for my life, my grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer and so on. I kept asking God why he wanted me in a place of weakness. To be honest, I was so frustrated with God. One day I was talking with a friend, and she gave me this verse from 2 Corinthians.

“Each time he said ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”

The moment I read this verse, my eyes became glassy and fill up with tears. The words in the Scripture felt as if God wrote them just for me. It became clear to me that God needed me in a state of weakness so I could recognize his power. I was trying to figure out life using my own strength. Each time I failed. God needed me to realize that it’s His power that gives me strength in life. Right now, God is asking me to embrace weakness in my life.

1. What does weakness look like to you? What does strength look like?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. What do you learn about God in this passage?

3. Throughout the Bible we see God using people despite their weakness or mistakes to accomplish His will. Do some Bible study to find who these people are and share with the group.

Embrace His Love – by Major Linda Vandiver

Philippians 4:6 - 7

“Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. And the God of peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

On Saturday, July 18th, our corps social workers son and girlfriend went to the Niobrara River to go swimming. Veronica jumped off the bridge first and Anthony followed. What happened in the next few minutes was devastating to say the least. Veronica never made it into the water and instead, she hit the rocks and immediately died.

After Veronica jumped Anthony followed and he too hit the rocks and broke his back and both feet including many lacerations and bruises. I share all of this because God works in ways we cannot understand. Anthony was airlifted to Sioux Falls hospital and placed in the ICU until he became stable. Anthony was in dire need for surgery to keep his back from injuring his spinal cord. His mother was notified and went directly to be with her son. With the news of this terrible accident, a prayer chain was started throughout the corps.

Anthony's mother went to Sioux Falls to be with him all while the city was in the midst of their annual jazz fest - which meant there were no hotel rooms available for her to stay. She called every hotel nearby, and was told there were no vacancies.

When I received this news, I decided to muddle through the internet to see if I could help her find a room. I called a hotel and spoke with a lady named “Grace.” She gave me three different numbers to phone to inquire about a room. I called the first two without an answer. Prayerfully, I called the last number. The receptionist answered and I shared the story about Anthony being in the ICU and told her my social worker from The Salvation Army needed a room for the week. What she said next shocked me. She told me she had been keeping one last room available, after turning many away, not knowing why, until I called.

I find that in life we often forget there is a God in heaven that cares about all that we care about. In fact, He cares more than we do. It is evidenced by the aid He sends our way. I've learned to embrace the love and care He provides for those we love and are devoted to. He never leaves us alone. We may feel alone, but this is a lie from the pit of Satan. He proves to me over and over again that He is closer than we realize. We must realize He is always close to us, because in Him we can continue to minister to others. He provides for our needs and carries us until things in this life become easier; and even then, we are no longer alone.

1. Has God ever blown you away with His provision? Share with the group.
2. How did that experience grow your faith?
3. What scriptures come to mind about God's love for us? Do some searching and share with the group.

Embrace Being an Example – by Captain Betsy Clark

1 Corinthians 11:1

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.”

Here’s a secret: I’m afraid to have people follow me, especially in my walk with Christ. It terrifies me. The responsibility of showing others how to follow Jesus is overwhelming. I am constantly worried about letting people down, failing in my spiritual life, or leading people down the wrong path. But more and more, I feel God’s call to be an example, to allow others to follow me as I follow Christ.

The more God says, “Be an example!” the more excuses I find. What if I mess up? Isn’t it sort of arrogant to tell people to follow you? Can’t I still be an example by sulking in the background where no one will take notice of me? All are excuses, because Christ, the light of the world, has appointed us to bring light to the darkness. He has commanded us to share the Gospel with the lost, to help them walk in the light.

Growing up, my family frequently went camping. At night, we would all take one last trip to the bathroom in the dark. One time, we ended up with only one flashlight, which my brother liked to carry. This was fine, except he never pointed the flashlight on the path. Instead he was pointing it up to the trees – totally not helpful. The rest of the family was frustrated and my brother was eventually relieved of flashlight duty, because we needed to see where we were going.

When I choose not to be an example, when I try to hide in the background, I am choosing to shine my flashlight away from the path of Christ. And if I’m really trying to follow God, if I’m really committed to living my life for Him, I should be willing and eager to shine my light (meaning HIS light) for others to see. So I’m learning to embrace being a light and being an example. It’s still scary and I still get nervous about it. But I’m still trying, because if no one will shine their light in darkness, how will anyone find the path of life?

1. How did Captain Betsy's experience speak to your / affect you?

2. Knowing that as a Christian you can shine the light of God for others to find their way to Him, how can you make some changes to become a better light-bearer?

3. Look up the verses below from the book of John. What does it say about Jesus? How does this compare to Matthew 5:14-16, when Jesus calls *us* the “light of the world”?

John 1:5; 3:19-20; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36

Embrace Seasons – by (Lt.) Rachel Aren

350 words provide hardly enough space to write about all the things God is teaching me to embrace this season. God is never done in me, and it seems like I'm always, always learning something. It's a blessing and some days a curse, really.

This season is formed by the following significant things: being 28, having a steady job that brings me fulfillment, having an amazing circle of faithful and supportive friends, a confident place at a welcoming and loving corps, having a fun life in Chicago (Lakeview to be exact), living near my family, and running a small business that I'm proud of. I would freely and easily say that I'm happy/content/etc. In fact, there is a sense most days that I've "made it" (Which, now that I'm a young adult understand that "made it" simply means I can pay rent on time with a job I actually like). I'm content; I'm mostly satisfied.

Last August, at the same time that I was starting to realize that all my life boxes were on the shelf of life the way I wanted, it was also the same time that God started to stir my heart for the next phase of the journey.

I have worked hard to be where I am at today, and although I love my life the way it is, I am learning to embrace that small discontent I have some days in my heart that my life may not be like this forever. God is doing more, taking me different places, using me in different ways. Most days I feel I have a clear understanding of what the next phase is, but some days I just embrace the notion that something is going to change, and although the timing for that is unclear and sometimes confusing, it will be BETTER than how much I love my life now.

So, this season is about embracing who holds my future and trusting His perfect timing and letting go of the life I plan for myself.


1. Describe your current season of life to your group.

2. At the time Lt. Rachel wrote this, the overall theme of her "seasons" was obedience. Do you feel you are being called to obedience in a certain way?

3. What does the Bible say about our obedience as believers? Do some research and share with the group.

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