

NEW CREATION

BUILD CHARACTER PATH



SPIRITUAL GROWTH PATH



Build Character: New Creation

*“Now, with God’s help, I shall become myself”
-Soren Kierkegaard*



SESSIONS

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Session 1

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DEFINED

Embraces, enjoys, and lives out of one's true identity in Christ, combating lies of the enemy with God's truth and power.

Read

We've heard the saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." This typically applies to a person who is stuck in their ways, unwilling or seemingly incapable of change. If we're being honest, we are all this way when it comes to changing our hearts (desires, habits, motivations, loves) because our hearts are crooked and deeply corrupt. God is not surprised by this. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God continually seeking after a people who turn away from Him time and time again. He gave them the Law to keep them close to Him and living in a way that promoted their flourishing and displayed God's image to the world, but they couldn't keep it. He gave them priests to keep the people pure so that He might live among them, but the priests couldn't keep their act together. And God gave them prophets, warning the people to turn back from their evil ways so that God might draw near to them and bless them again. But God knew all of this wasn't enough, that their behaviour could never change while their hearts remained sick and hardened. This is why the prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). As author Matthew Henry aptly writes, "sin is the blackness of the soul; it is the discolouring of it...so that we cannot get clear of it by any power of our own." We have a heart problem, and our heart problem doesn't require repair but a total transplant. We need a new heart.

Jesus picks up on this theme as we read of Him in the gospels. He doesn't call us to change ourselves, He calls us to die. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:2). It's only when we experience this death to our old self that we can experience the new life Jesus promises. The Apostle Paul explains this work of transformation in his letter to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

We learn from Paul that this kind of death to our old self and old life is only possible when we turn to Jesus and entrust our whole selves to Him. Only Jesus can perform the heart transplant we require. So, we don't need Jesus to simply help us change; we desperately need Him to do the work of transformation that is utterly beyond our ability. To come to Him is to change. It's through knowing Him— His love for us and that He is completely worthy of our trust, that we can drop our guard and let Him in to do what we cannot. As a result, He gives us a new identity. He gives us His identity. If anyone is in Christ," Paul wrote, "he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

While this new identity is sure and unchangeable, we will spend our entire lives learning how to live in it and believe it. The enemy knows this and attacks it with the same strategy he has used for thousands of years. He lies to us. This is why Jesus referred to our enemy as "the father of lies" (John 8:44). We should not be surprised, then, that when it comes to living as the new creation we are, we must identify deeply embedded lies about ourselves and replace them with the truth we find in Scripture. When we daily choose to believe and embrace the wondrous work of Christ in our lives, this will naturally lead to a new kind of living that looks like Jesus. We have been raised with Christ that "we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

Read

EVIDENCE OF THIS SPIRITUAL OUTCOME IN A PERSON'S LIFE

- Regularly repents and turns to God for help in areas of life that need to change.
- Knows and considers what God says about one's identity in Scripture and lives out of that reality.
- Can identify a change in the way one thinks and acts as a result of intentionally living in one's true identity in Christ.
- Is aware of personal points of vulnerability to the enemy's lies and knows the truths that combat these lies.

Discuss

Discussion Question:

How have you experienced or observed the following spiritual outcomes in your life or the lives of others: regularly repenting and seeking God's help for change, living out of your true identity in Christ, witnessing changes in thought and behavior, and being aware of vulnerabilities to the enemy's lies and the truths that combat them?

Read

Read each passage multiple times. Then, write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

JEREMIAH 13:23

Observations:

Discuss

Discernment Question: Here, Jeremiah tells us we are incapable of true transformation on our own. Does that truth bring relief or anxiety? Why so?

EZEKIEL 36:26

Observations:

Discuss

Discernment Question: Can you think of a time where your affections were stirred toward God? What prompted that experience?

Additional Discussion

If you have the opportunity, consider the following supplementary questions to facilitate your study and foster discussions. Feel free to choose the ones that resonate most with your group's interests.

1. How did God attempt to draw His people closer to Him in the Old Testament, and what were the outcomes?
2. Why is it insufficient for behaviour to change if the heart remains sick and hardened?
3. What does Jesus call us to do in order to experience true transformation, and how does this relate to taking up our cross?
4. What does Galatians 2:20 teach us about the transformation process and our relationship with Jesus?
5. How does entrusting our whole selves to Jesus relate to the work of transformation in our lives?
6. Why is it necessary to spend our entire lives learning how to live in our new identity?
7. Why does the enemy attack our new identity with lies, and how does this connect to Jesus calling him "the father of lies"?
8. What does it mean to daily choose to believe and embrace the work of Christ in our lives, and how does this lead to a new kind of living?
9. How can we recognize and identify the deeply embedded lies about ourselves, and why is it essential to replace them with biblical truth?
10. What role does the truth found in Scripture play in combating the lies of the enemy?

Session 2

Read

REALITY

We all hate hypocrisy. Let's be honest, though. We all are guilty of pretending we're one way on the outside when that's not our experience on the inside. We have all preached against things that we internally know we've been guilty of. Have you ever accused someone of being judgmental toward others and the very next minute made a snap judgment in your head about someone you just met- maybe because of how they dressed, talked, or acted toward you? Have you ever scoffed at a fellow driver who honked at you for accidentally cutting them off and then 5 miles down the road you are honking and cussing out a driver who did the same thing? We are all hypocrites. The church, unfortunately, is no exception. We can talk a big talk and get hung up on blatant, flashy sins out in the world and completely miss the mess that is living right within us.

Jesus, in His famous Sermon on the Mount, gets at this very issue as He speaks to a large crowd of people:

You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

We should be thinking of Moses and the 10 Commandments there. Much like Moses, Jesus is delivering the law to the people, but He does something more with it. He deepens it. He demonstrates here that while our outward actions can appear pure, our hearts can be deeply impure, and therefore, just as guilty. God has never been interested in our outward obedience if it is divorced from the heart. Jesus later on quotes the prophet Isaiah to point out this age-old hypocrisy: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." God has always desired us to be devoted to Him at the heart-level.

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

Jesus came not to change our behaviour, but to change our hearts so that we not only obey God, but delight in obeying Him. What Jesus enables when He comes into our lives is transformation at this heart level. How it works is that, as our affection for Him deepens, the more our love for sin wanes. This is the process of transformation. It's not about forcing oneself to refrain from adultery or any other external action. It's about becoming the kind of person who genuinely doesn't want to commit adultery.

Although at times necessary, forcing external action without genuine internal desire is a frustrating way to live. When internal desire matches the external reality of what we know to be good and healthy, there's a resonance that's nothing short of life. And life is very much what Christ came to bring: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Lust and adultery are simply one example.

*D*iscuss

Consider generosity.

What if we became the kind of people who didn't give out of obligation but gave out of desire? That our hearts are so full of love for God that we see our money as a way to love Him more. As God has been abundantly generous with us, we can't help but be generous toward others.

Consider kindness.

What if we were genuinely kind people externally and internally? What if when we encountered people that angered or annoyed us, we responded with kindness, not because Jesus told us to, but because we see them as having deep, intrinsic value as created beings? What if we were so secure in Christ's love for us that we weren't crushed every time someone failed to love us perfectly?

Consider self-control.

What if our temptations to sin remained temptations? What if we were the kind of people who faced temptation and said, "No!"? What would it look like to have such control over what we see, hear, taste, touch that our minds become a place where only thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy reside? (See Philippians 4:8).

You're probably thinking this sounds too good to be true or that this sounds impossible. And yes, by our own effort, this is entirely impossible. So, if we are going to grow in character, we must dig more deeply into the supernatural work of Christ. What did Christ bring? What did he teach? What does he do for us today? As we consider our own encounter with Jesus, let's eavesdrop on another's encounter with him.

Read

Read each passage multiple times. Then, write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

JOHN 3:1-8

Observations:

Discuss

Discernment Question: Have you meditated on the reality that if you have trusted Christ, the Spirit of God has birthed new life in you? How have you seen this new life in your daily life?

A NEW REALITY

Nicodemus was a religious man in the worst sort of way.

He aligned himself with the Pharisees. Pharisees were notorious for outside conformity without inside transformation. Christ boldly challenged this. He called them whitewashed tombs. Tombs look elegant and refined on the outside; they're made of marble and are often ornate, but open the door and you'll quickly discover death on the inside. To say the least, Christ's word-picture made it clear he wasn't too excited by this form of religion. With that in mind, it's fascinating to eavesdrop on a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is intrigued. He comes to Jesus after hours under the cover of darkness. He strikes up a conversation. He compliments Jesus. He calls him Rabbi. He admires his miracles and clear workings of God.

Jesus, clearly unaffected by the compliments, tells it like it is: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he experiences a new birth" (John 3:3).

Nicodemus' response reveals his surprise, maybe scoffing, at this idea: "No one can enter a second time into his mother's womb!" (John 3:4).

He doesn't get it. He isn't aware of the good news unfolding right before his eyes. Nicodemus has missed critical drumbeats along the way. This Messiah standing before him would usher in change, but this change would not be just another addition to Nicodemus' growing list of religious activities and things to do. This change would involve an entirely new reality. Once seen, this new reality changes everything. It could be stated many ways, but if we are to experience transformation, we must not miss two observations:

Jesus did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing person. Jesus insisted he become a new person (the new birth).

Jesus did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing reality. Jesus referenced a new reality (the kingdom of God).

It's as if Jesus is saying, "Making changes to your existing person will not work. Making changes to the existing reality will not work. You must become a new person, living in a new reality. Anything short of this will simply be yet another program that comes and goes."

And we know this.

In the next session, we'll discuss new birth and what Jesus meant by it.

Additional Discussion

If you have the opportunity, consider the following supplementary questions to facilitate your study and foster discussions. Feel free to choose the questions most resonate with your group's interests.

1. How does the author suggest that we are all guilty of hypocrisy somehow, and what are some personal examples of this in your life?
2. How does Jesus change our hearts and transform us at a heart level?
3. In what ways does a genuine desire for generosity differ from giving out of obligation?
4. How does the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus reveal the contrast between religious conformity and inner transformation?
5. What was Nicodemus' initial response to Jesus' statement about experiencing a new birth, and why do you think he reacted this way?
6. How does the concept of a new birth challenge the idea of religious rituals and activities as a means of transformation?
7. How can we apply the understanding that we must become a new person living in a new reality to our own lives and transformation?
8. Why is it crucial not to miss the concept that transformation is about becoming a new person in a new reality, and how can we apply this in our journey of spiritual growth?

Session 3

Read

MURDERERS

When it comes to understanding Scripture, context is everything. Isolated texts, when taken out of context, can cause a great deal of confusion. We read something, and we think, "Does it really mean that?" But, we must remember that all of Scripture was written at a particular time, to a particular audience for a particular purpose. When we make the effort to not shy away from difficult passages, but to engage our mind through exploring the text in its context, we may come out with a completely different perspective than we started with. Take 1 John 3:15 for instance:

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

At first blush maybe it makes sense: Murderers don't get eternal life. That sounds reasonable. For one person to take the life of another is a serious offense. There's justice in the statement. We shouldn't be surprised at the thought that murderers don't get eternal life.

Or should we?

For starters, the passage states that the act of hating one's brother is on par with murder. Who among us hasn't been guilty of hate? Even more, since when is murder the unforgivable sin? It sounds terribly out of character for Scripture and even hypocritical. Three of the Bible's most noteworthy writers were murderers or accomplices to murder. Moses murdered an Egyptian. David arranged the wrongful death of Uriah, the husband of a woman with whom he had an affair. Paul participated in the stoning of Stephen and probably other early followers of Christ. If murderers are categorically out, then these three men are out.

What's with that? Are murderers categorically rejected by God?

When we dig deeper, the shocking answer is: Yes, murderers are categorically rejected by God. We can say with biblical authority that murderers don't go to heaven. God sees this grievous offense and does not shrug it off.

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

Scripture is abundantly clear: There will be no murderers in heaven. Murderers are out. And actually, more than just murderers. Consider the following:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

So now this just got real. It was one thing when it was just murderers; now we're talking everybody. If the previous passage associates hate with murder, we can assume attitudes that run on the same tracks of the acts mentioned here associate with those acts as well. Not all have been male prostitutes, but most have experienced twisted lust.

Then there's mention of greed and slander. Those right there could encompass pretty much all humanity. It's a bleak story and even a bit nerve-racking up to the very next line—one of the more stunning statements of Scripture.

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

There's something in this statement we must not miss. Yes, we've heard of forgiveness in Christ. Forgiveness in Christ is incredible, but our understanding of forgiveness is often shallow. We must not miss that first line: "And that is This tells us that the person who was once categorized and labeled murderer is no longer categorized and labeled murderer when that person has experienced the washing of Christ. The good news of Christ is not just the reality that the offense is no longer held against a person. The good news is that the murderer is no longer a murderer. The adulterer is no longer an adulterer. The thief is no longer a thief.

John can tell us that "no murderer has eternal life," and he can mean this literally. Murderers will not go to heaven. They are categorically out. But when a person experiences the washing of Christ, that person is not just forgiven. That person becomes a new person.

Might the person experience earthly consequences for past offenses? Of course. The murderer may be in prison, but if he has been washed by Christ then he is no longer a murderer. He is a new creation. He is forgiven from his past, and his past is considered by God to be another person, the old person who was then crucified with Christ. Consider the following: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We must not view forgiveness as just saying, "I'm sorry," and God saying, "That's okay." We must view forgiveness as the gift of becoming a new person no longer associated with the old person. God declares the old person gone, and so must we.

*D*iscuss

ROMANS 6:1-14

Observations:

Discernment Question: Just as we died with Christ on the cross, we rise to new life in his resurrection. How has this newness of life made you different from your old self?

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

Observations:

Discernment Question: Do you consider the spiritual war that's going on around you and how it affects your thoughts? How do you typically handle that battle?

Session 4

Read

NAMES

Consider a childhood lie...

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. We know better. How often would we prefer a stick or a stone to the words thrown our way? Words are powerful. The child on the playground slumps back to class believing she's worthless. The employee in the office slumps back to his desk believing he'll never get it right. The wife in the car slumps down in her seat convinced she's intrinsically displeasing. These degradations need not come by actions, but simply by words, accusations, and names.

Scripture knows the power of words. And yes, at times these words are strong. To a group of religious hypocrites, Jesus cries out, "You brood of vipers!" (Matthew 3:7). Christ himself was known to shoot straight with words. At one time he referred to Pharisees and Sadducees as "whitewashed tombs" and "blind guides" (Matthew 15:14,23:27). Such statements underscore God's disdain for flattery. Jesus would not refer to a group of leaders as "blind guides" if he were not interested in their recognition of reality. He shot straight. He would not puff them up with statements that were not true to make them falsely feel good about themselves. This is not the way of Christ.

Which makes the following statement from Scripture worthy of careful consideration. It's a statement we likely skim over; a simple introduction to a multi-page letter. We read it as little more than, "Dear so and so," but the meaning is far more profound. To the church in Ephesus, Paul writes, "To the saints who are at Ephesus..." (Ephesians 1:1, NASB).

Saints? This must be a letter to a special class, just to the leaders, just to the inner circle. If so, though, why does Paul then speak directly to husbands, wives, children, and slaves? If by "saints" Paul means a special class of people who have attained a high degree of maturity, would he not speak about these people rather than to these people? The letter, from beginning to end, is fully intended for the entire church and to be read to the entire church, which makes that brief introduction something to ponder.

He calls them saints.

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

Lift the hood on that word, saint, and discover the Greek word hagios, meaning "holy." One could translate this introduction: "To the holy at Ephesus..." Similar introductions are found in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and Colossians. In search of a name for his recipients, Paul commonly refers to them as "the holy." That's profound.

And it leads to a question we must each ask ourselves. The question is simply this...

Discuss

What would I name myself?

Or put another way...

Would I give myself the name "holy"?

Forget for a minute that it sounds odd. Simply touch that emotion that instinctively doubts that it's true.

I'm not holy. To call me holy is flattery.

Or is it?

FREE FROM ACCUSATION

In another place, Paul writes this:

"Once, you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." Colossians 1:21-22.

We're given a stunning view of the future. One day, because of Christ, we will stand before God "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." Let that soak.

Holy in his sight.

Without blemish.

Free from accusation.

Where this incredible statement becomes a showstopper is when we pause long enough to realize that this holy and blemish-free reality is not based on something that will happen in the future but is based on something that has happened in the past. What did Paul write? "Once you were alienated from God... But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death."

Once you were alienated.

But now...

The reconciliation does not happen later. The reconciliation has happened. For this reason, in another place, Paul writes:

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." (Romans 5:1-2) It is not, "to those who will one day have peace with God."

It is "to those who have peace with God today."

It is not, "to those who will one day stand in grace." It is "to those who stand in grace today." Translation?

"To the saints who are at Ephesus..."

It is not, "to those who will one day be holy."

It is "to those who are holy today."

*D*iscuss

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Observations:

Discernment Question: How have you experienced the contrast between your old life and the new? What is the biggest change that you've seen?

Additional Discussion

If you have the opportunity, consider the following supplementary questions to facilitate your study and foster discussions. Feel free to choose the questions most resonate with your group's interests.

1. How does the text emphasize the impact of words and names on our lives and self-perception?
2. Why are words and accusations often more hurtful than physical harm, as mentioned in the passage?
3. What examples of the power of words and accusations can you recall from your own experiences?
6. What is the significance of Paul addressing the entire church in Ephesus as "saints," and why is it more profound than it may seem?
9. Have you ever considered giving yourself the name "holy"? How does this notion make you feel, and what doubts arise?
12. How does the passage from Colossians challenge the perception that holiness is something to be achieved in the future?
17. How does Ephesians 2:1-10 illustrate the contrast between the old life and the new life in Christ?
18. What is the most significant change you've personally experienced in transitioning from your old life to your new life in Christ?
19. How does understanding and embracing the idea of being called "saints" and "holy" impact your identity as a believer?
20. How can these passages inspire and motivate you to live in the reality of your present identity as a holy and blemish-free individual, free from accusation?

Session 5

Read

RECOGNIZE THE REAL ME

Consider a question:

How do I perceive myself?

This may sound like a trivial question, but it's anything but trivial. Truth is, we live up to our own self-perception. Those who view themselves as dirty continue to revel in the mud. Those who perceive themselves as blameless in Christ, will live from this self-perception as well. To live from this truth, you must come to see yourself as the new, real you.

Jesus does not ask Nicodemus to work on improving himself, but insists he become a new person, to experience a new birth, a spiritual birth. It's a fresh start in which those who trust in Jesus are reborn into the image God designed them to have. Our new birth in Jesus means we become truly human as Jesus is truly human.

This is a difficult reality to wrap our minds around because we can't see this reality in its fullness just yet. This reality is often referred to as the "already, but not yet," meaning, we are simultaneously new creation *and* becoming new creation. As the Apostle Paul claims, as we seek to reflect God's glory, we "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). As we follow Christ in our lives, we will naturally become more and more like Him, and therefore, more and more of our true self.

An important way in which we grow into this new self is through the discipline of thought. How we think about ourselves matters. The *perception* of our own reality may or may not be *genuine* reality. We may view ourselves as dirty and dead, while, in Christ, our reality is holy and alive. The false perception of ourselves is an affront to the gospel, an offense. It is calling into question the very good and powerful work God has accomplished in Christ.

When Paul wrote the church in Rome, he exhorted them to recognize their new reality when he stated plainly: "*Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 6:11).

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

Count yourselves... consider yourselves... evaluate yourselves...

Dead to sin and alive to God.

This concept of "counting" oneself is a mathematical term. It means to determine something by mathematical process. So, to count ourselves "dead to sin and alive to God" means that we have observed the data and come to the proper conclusion of our new identity. This requires that we think and ponder the identity statements God makes about us that we choose to replace our old thoughts about ourselves with the new reality.

Consider another bold statement: "*We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died*" (2 Corinthians 5:14). That's astounding. Jesus is not the only one who died on the cross. By grace, our old self died with him.

It is completely illogical and biologically impossible for a dead thing to walk and talk. So, we need to consider the foolishness of trying to keep our old dead and rotting self alive! For that reason, this bold statement is followed by another bold statement: "*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view*" (2 Corinthians 5:16). In short, the real *me* is not the *me* who died on the cross with Christ. The real *me* is the *me* who rose with Christ from the grave (Romans 6:4).

I must recognize the real me.

Discuss

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

Observations:

Discernment Question: What do you think about? What do you meditate on? Is it reflective of your new life in Christ or your old life apart from Christ?

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

Observations:

Discernment Question: One day you will be presented holy and blameless before God in Christ. How does this reality influence your daily living?

Additional Discussion

If you have the opportunity, consider the following supplementary questions to facilitate your study and foster discussions. Feel free to choose the questions most resonate with your group's interests.

1. How does our self-perception impact our behaviour and choices in life?
2. What is the correlation between self-perception and living up to that perception?
3. In what way does the concept of the "already, but not yet" apply to our new birth in Jesus, and what does it signify about our true self?
4. How does 2 Corinthians 3:18 describe the process of growing into our true self as we follow Christ?
5. How can we replace old thoughts about ourselves with the new reality, as suggested in Romans 6:11?
6. What is the logical implication of being dead to sin and alive in Christ, as discussed in 2 Corinthians 5:14?
7. How does Romans 6:4 emphasize the transition from the old self to the real self in Christ?
8. How can the process of recognizing the real self lead to a more meaningful and transformative experience of one's identity in Christ?
9. What thoughts and ideas occupy your mind, and how do they align with your new life in Christ or your old life apart from Christ, as suggested in Philippians 4:8?
10. How can recognizing the real you, as discussed in this study, serve as a source of strength and confidence in your journey of faith and personal growth?

Session 6

Read

TRAGIC

Peter, one of Christ's earliest followers, spoke of lives that are "ineffective and unproductive in their knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). What a sad observation. He sees lives that could be filled with passion and purpose. These are lives where old patterns of destructive living could be broken, and even more, these are lives that could influence others toward new realities in Christ. And yet, they are "ineffective and unproductive in their knowledge of Christ."

He couples this ineffective living with a disassociation from a person's own reality. They have forgotten something critical. He puts it like this: "They have forgotten that they were cleansed from their past sins" (2 Peter 1:9).

They have forgotten.

It's not that they didn't know it. They knew it. They just forgot about it. They were cleansed from the "old me," and they forgot about it. To miss this new reality is not only to embrace a warped view of reality-it's tragic. What happens when we view ourselves as our old selves? What happens when our perception of reality is that we may be forgiven, but we're certainly not new? What happens if we view ourselves as devalued and damaged goods? In short, we live in accordance with that old reality.

Consider the person who believes she's wearing a fake diamond. She found it tucked away in a little black box and was certain it was nothing. Why take care of the diamond? It's not worth much. It's little more than glass. Fling it on the dresser, drag it through the mud, or lose it in the carpet. Who cares? It's worthless. Or is it? One day she opens the family lock box to discover a note written by her grandmother describing a multi-carat diamond she'd left in a small black box.

Perception influences action. The person who believes his car is trashy will treat that car in a trashy manner. The person who believes her house is dilapidated will treat that house in a dilapidated manner.

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

This new heart we have been given will beat for the greatest and grandest of things, the love of God. If, though, we deny this new heart and assume the old heart, we will, no doubt, live in accordance with our old self, our old heart. If Christ has done a revolutionary work, we must recognize this work and deny old perceptions. To miss this will influence our actions, and even more, it will offend God who created us and gave His own Son to make us new!

HONORING GOD

Some offer an understandable objection to this teaching. It goes something like this: If I'm to recognize the real me, then I'm making a big deal out of me. I don't want to make a big deal out of me. I want to make a big deal out of God.

Fair enough, but consider this: As we gaze upon the painting, and as we affirm the richness and creativity of the painting, who gets the honor: the painting or the painter? Or put another way, as we walk through the magnificent new home, as we consider the creativity and interest of the design, the thoughtfulness of the layout, who gets the praise: the house itself or the designer of the house?

To celebrate the creation is to honor the Creator. We are told by Scripture that "we are God's workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10). As we affirm and "recognize the real me," the purpose is not self-worship. This would be a gross misapplication of this imperative.

Rather, our aim is eternally greater. By recognizing the painting, we praise the Painter. By celebrating the craftsmanship, we honor the Craftsman.

And, of course, the opposite is true. If we define ourselves by our struggles and wounds, not only do we deny the very real work of God, but we dishonor God by demeaning his work. To belittle the creation is to belittle the Creator. To celebrate the good work God has done in our lives is not arrogance; it is humility because it is inspired by the good, mighty, and loving work of God. Scripture does not define us by our old self. Scripture defines those who genuinely follow Christ as "the holy."

BUILD CHARACTER

If we are to make progress in our character, if we are to live bold and courageous lives, if we are to overcome and live in accordance with what we know is right and good, then we must be a people that recognizes and treasures the good work God has done in us through Christ.

Why grovel in our old selves when we can revel in our new selves? Why diminish this work and consequently diminish the God of this work? The life lived in accordance with the mighty and gracious work God has already accomplished in Christ is far greater. When we recognize this, and live from this, we will ever-increasingly live in accordance with who we truly are.



1 JOHN 3:1-3
Observations:

Discernment Question: How has being made a child of God, and having hope for Christ's appearing, inspired purification in your life?

Homework For Next Session

Consider again this brief paragraph from the reading...

Perception influences action. The person who believes his car is trashy will treat that car in a trashy manner. The person who believes her house is dilapidated will treat that house in a dilapidated manner. Tragic is the life lived with a warped view of self. This new heart we have been given will beat for the greatest and grandest things- God's love. If, though, we deny this new heart and assume the old heart, we will, no doubt, live in accordance with our old self, our old heart. If Christ has done a revolutionary work, we must recognize this work and deny old perceptions. To miss this will influence our actions, and even more, it will dishonour God.

Put succinctly: Perception influences fruit.

In this exercise, you work to uncover harmful misperceptions about the real you, and then develop brief affirmations, based on Scripture, about who you truly are in Christ. As with all exercises, you will get out of this what you put into it. Because identifying misperceptions could bring significant and lasting change to your life, you're encouraged to make the most of this exercise.

Not only are you encouraged to be thoughtful and prayerful, but you're also encouraged to process these openly with your Life Group. Doing so will provide an opportunity for increased insight into yourself and into truths found in Scripture that could very well bring needed insight and healing.

Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

To Complete For The Next Session

Consider the following questions concerning influences on your self-perception:

What voices from your past (positive or negative) influence your current perception of yourself (parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, colleagues, friends, spouse, former spouse, etc.)? How have they done so?

What voices in your present (positive or negative) influence your perception of yourself (parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, colleagues, friends, spouse, former spouse, etc.)? How do they do so?

What successes or failures influence your perception of yourself? How have they done so?

What expectations did or do you have on your life that influence your perception of yourself-positively or negatively (relational expectations, vocational expectations, family expectations, etc.)?

What struggles do you have or battles do you fight that influence your perception of yourself (temptations, health, sin, etc.)?

To Complete For The Next Session

The following are examples of self-perceptions:

SELF-PERCEPTION: I view myself as unlovable and undesirable due to how I was treated in certain past relationships.

SELF-PERCEPTION: I view myself as successful. This may be good, but I also see arrogance as I view myself as more important than others.

SELF-PERCEPTION : I view myself as unclean, dirty, and incapable of beating temptation.

SELF-PERCEPTION: I view myself as incapable of doing anything truly important in the world.

State your own self-perceptions based on your thoughts and insights gained from the above questions.

SELF-PERCEPTION:

SELF-PERCEPTION:

SELF-PERCEPTION :

SELF-PERCEPTION:

Additional Information About Misperceptions

Anxiety Misperceptions

Anxiety Lies

- Lies about personal well-being
- Lies about finances and material needs
- Lies about life challenges
- Lies about phobias and fears

Passages to Consider

Deuteronomy 1:6-9

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 1:6-8

"Ah, Sovereign LORD, "I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Matthew 6:25-27

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Matthew 6:31-34

So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Additional Information About Misperceptions

Personal Misperceptions

Personal Lies

- Lies about God's forgiveness
- Lies about God's purification
- Lies about God's empowerment and equipping

Passages to Consider

Psalm 147:10-11

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

Additional Information About Misperceptions

Temptation Misperceptions

Temptation Lies

- Lies about God's power to break habitual behavior
- Lies about personal ability to resist temptation
- Lies about what will truly make us happy

Passages to Consider

Proverbs 1:10-19

My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse"- my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood. How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds! These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves! Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it.

Romans 6:13

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Timothy 6:9

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Hebrews 2:18

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

James 1:13-14

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

2 Peter 3:17

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

Additional Information About Misperceptions

Hardship Misperceptions

Hardship Lies

- If God loved me, this would not be happening.
- If God loved me, I would have
- I cannot make it through this
- God is not able to solve this problem. God is not really in control

Passages to Consider

Job 2:9-10

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Psalm 68:5

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

Psalm 126:5

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

Isaiah 25:8

He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Hebrews 12:11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

1 Peter 4:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

Revelation 2:10

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Session 7

Discuss

Please take a look at your home from the previous section and share some of your insights from the misperception sections.

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

Read

Affirmations

Self-perceptions are often misperceptions. Misperceptions are healed with truth. On the page that follows are examples of affirmations. Use these as examples to develop your affirmations to address areas of misperception.

Use the passages of Scripture listed toward the end of this exercise and organize by category. These are provided to help you figure out truths that will strengthen your affirmations. With your self-perceptions in mind, review these passages and look for truths that correct any misperceptions.

Sample Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." 2 Peter 1:3

Affirmation Statement: *I have what I need to follow Christ.*

Affirmation Description: *(Against stronghold: I'm not capable of following Christ.) God has given me everything I need to follow him. I'm not enslaved to past failures. I have what I need today. God has given me great grace.*

Review Plan: *Review at breakfast daily*

Scripture: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." Romans 5:1-2

Affirmation Statement: *Because God is my God, I will live peacefully today.*

Affirmation Description: *(Against stronghold: My peace is dictated by those around me.) God is at peace with me. Others may not be at peace with me today, but God is the authority. If I am fully acceptable to him, then I, too, fully accept myself.*

Review Plan Review: *before team meetings at work.*

Sample Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"²
Corinthians 5:17

Affirmation Statement: *By God's grace, through Christ, I am whole.*

Affirmation Description: *(Against stronghold: I am broken beyond repair.) Past mistakes are exactly that: past. I am a new creation filled with love for God and those around me. I will not settle for anything less. I will live in accordance with who I truly am.*

Review Plan: *Review when I wake up and before I go to sleep.*

Sample Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

Affirmation Statement: *God is with me; I am not alone.*

Affirmation Description: *(Against stronghold: I am all alone; my circumstances will overwhelm me.) I will not be afraid of the challenges that face me today, but I will trust God and acknowledge his presence with me today.*

Review Plan: *Review before driving home from work.*

Discuss & Complete

For the next session, complete your affirmation. Worksheets are available at the end of this session.

Read

In Session 8, we will talk about the following activity in depth. Take time to read this as a group during session 7.

Letter from God.

Use this resource in your group to encourage members to reflect on how God views and feels about them. There are two suggested ways to engage with this exercise:

1. Read the following questions to the group and take time over until you meet again to reflect on these questions. During session 8 allow each person time to answer.
2. Distribute these questions to your group during session 7. Before session 8 seek God's responses, and write a letter to yourself as if it were from God, expressing how He answers each of these questions:

- How did God react when you were conceived?
- How did He celebrate when you were born?
- What are some of His favourite characteristics of you?
- How does He see you?
- What are His deepest desires for you?
- What are His intentions for you?
- How has He pursued you, and how is He currently pursuing you?
- What does He enjoy about the adventures you embark on together?
- What is He looking forward to concerning you?
- How does He want to surprise you?
-

Either way, you do this, spend time debriefing and sharing during session 8.

*Take it further: Explore scripture passages that affirm each of the things you've written. Consider memorizing some of these scriptures for personal reflection and encouragement.

Complete Your Own Affirmations

Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture

Affirmation Statement

Affirmation Description

Review Plan

Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture

Affirmation Statement

Affirmation Description

Review Plan

Complete Your Own Affirmations

Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture

Affirmation Statement

Affirmation Description

Review Plan

Affirmation about the Real Me

Scripture

Affirmation Statement

Affirmation Description

Review Plan

Session 8

*D*iscuss

In the last session, we discussed the following activity.

Take time to review this activity together and your response.

Letter from God.

Use this resource in your group to encourage members to reflect on how God views and feels about them. There are two suggested ways to engage with this exercise:

1. Read the following questions to the group and allow each member time to answer.
2. Or read out your letters from God.

The purpose of this activity is to seek God's responses and write a letter to yourself as if it were from God, expressing how He answers each of these questions:

- How did God react when you were conceived?
- How did He celebrate when you were born?
- What are some of His favourite characteristics of you?
- How does He see you?
- What are His deepest desires for you?
- What are His intentions for you?
- How has He pursued you, and how is He currently pursuing you?
- What does He enjoy about the adventures you embark on together?
- What is He looking forward to concerning you?
- How does He want to surprise you?

Either way, you do this activity spend time debriefing and sharing during Session 8.

*Take it further: Explore scripture passages that affirm each of the things you've written. Consider memorizing some of these scriptures for personal reflection and encouragement.

*D*iscuss

Share some of your affirmations from the homework assigned in the previous session.

Discussion:
Have someone in your group read this section out loud.

Notes

