

How the study will work:

There are ten lessons in this study. You may choose to read the lesson for each day or watch the video. Please note that the content is the same no matter format which you choose.

Please be sure that you have downloaded the Bible Study Pack, in which you will find the study questions and video notes (with blanks to fill in as you watch) for each lesson.

We'll be using the CRAVE Bible study method, because my hope is that this short study will cause you to crave more of God's Word 😊 There are several steps to the study, but some of them are optional. However, the more time you invest in the study, the more you will get out of it.

FOR EACH LESSON:

1. Copy the focal passage for each lesson. Simply handwrite the verse/passage word-for-word into a journal or on the back of the worksheet.
2. Read the passage. Read it slowly and deliberately, focusing on the meaning of each word. It may also help to read it from various translations. You can find them online from sites like [Bible Hub](#) or [BibleGateway](#) if you don't have any other translations at home to refer to.
3. Answer the questions. There is a worksheet with the lesson's verse or passage and a series of questions to answer to help you dig deeper into the text.
4. View the video. I'll be posting a short video on my blog for each lesson to help you understand the passage better. You may also choose to read the lesson transcript instead. You can find those videos here:
5. Engage the passage. Once you are familiar with what the passage is saying and what it means, think about some ways that you can apply the passage personally to your life. There are questions included on the worksheet to help you.

*Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is from the ESV Bible.

*This study was originally intended to be done over the course of ten consecutive days. If you choose to read the lesson transcript, you may work at your own pace. However, I will only post one lesson video each week.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Outline:

“If anyone is in Christ...”

Lesson One: We are united to Christ through our faith in Him (Gal. 2:20).

Lesson Two: We are united to Christ by our commitment to Him (Matthew 16:24-26).

“He is a new creation...”

Lesson Three: We become a new creation by being born again (John 3:3).

Lesson Four: We are becoming new through sanctification (Rom. 8:29).

Lesson Five: We will not be perfectly new until we reach heaven (1 John 3:2).

“The old has passed away...”

Lesson Six: We cannot follow our own sinful desires (James 4:1-3).

Lesson Seven: We cannot live like the world around us (James 4:4).

Lesson Eight: We cannot give in to the devil’s temptation (James 4:7).

“The new has come...”

Lesson Nine: We must live worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1-3).

Lesson Ten: We must renounce our old godless way of life and live godly lives (Titus 2:11-14).

Introduction

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Have you ever messed something up so badly that you couldn't fix it? Your only choice was to scrap it and start over? My husband has Celiac disease, so we have to be on a gluten free diet. Baking gluten free is not easy, and gluten free food doesn't always turn out the same as regular food. I tried making biscuits one time using my mom's recipe, but substituting a gluten free flour for the regular. They were totally inedible, as hard as rocks. We had to throw out the whole batch and start over.

Unfortunately, we humans are good at messing things up. It may be something simple like dinner, or it may be something important like a relationship, but we all tend to ruin things at times. It all started with our first parents, Adam and Eve. God had given them this beautiful life in paradise, but it didn't take long for them to ruin it with sin and rebellion. They were used to walking with God in the Garden and talking to Him face to face, but their sin destroyed that relationship. They were forced to leave the Garden, also leaving behind the intimacy with God that they had previously known. Not only were they cursed as a result of their sin, the earth itself also was tainted and is in a state of decay.

As a result of Adam's sin, all of his offspring through the generations have been born with a sinful nature. Because we are all sinful, we are also all alienated from God. On our own there is nothing we can do to restore that relationship or remove our guilt. The good news is, we don't have to do it on our own. God chose to provide everything we need through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Adam and Eve messed up this world, and we continue to mess it up. God, however, has a plan to restore things to the way they were meant to be. When we are saved through faith in Christ, that restoration process begins in us, and Jesus promises that what He begins in us will be completed one day (Philippians 1:6). God will also start over with the earth by destroying the fallen world and creating it anew.

Our study is called “A New Creation.” The focal verse of the study is 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” This verse is full of such beautiful promise! Over ten lessons, we will take this verse apart, looking at it piece by piece. Join me as we discuss what it means to be in Christ, how we become new creations, and what it looks like in our daily lives that the old has gone and the new has come.

Lesson One: "If anyone is in Christ..."

We are united to Christ through our faith in Him.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

I go through these phases where I pick a TV show that I like, and then that's all I watch until I've seen every episode available. Recently, I started watching reruns of an old makeover show called *What Not to Wear*. The hosts of the show surprise unsuspecting people with a makeover and money to buy a whole new wardrobe. These people are nominated by friends and family because they dress in a way that is sloppy, frumpy, or just inappropriate. There have been some episodes where, with a new hairstyle, makeup, and clothes, the people were unrecognizable by the end of the show when they returned home to show off their new looks to the ones who nominated them. They looked like a new person.

The truth is, we all need makeovers, only we need a spiritual makeover, not a physical one. As a result of the Fall, we are born with a sinful heart and a rebellious nature. According to Romans 3:10-12, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." This is a pretty grim picture of who we were as unbelievers.

We also read in Ephesians 4:17-20 that unbelievers are blinded to the truth; they have no fellowship with God; they are stubbornly resistant to any positive moral influence; they feel no grief or shame over their sin; and they want to sin more and more. However, Paul says we are no longer to live like that, because that's not what we've learned from Christ. So, the key to our spiritual makeover is found in Christ, or, more specifically, by our *being* in Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, which says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

What does it mean to be in Christ? In part, it means to be united with Christ by placing our faith in Him and by being committed to Him. In today's lesson we're going to focus on faith in Christ, and tomorrow we'll discuss being committed to Him.

In Galatians 2:20, we read about our union with Christ as a result our faith. It says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

From this passage, I've identified four things about being united to Christ:

First, we are united to Christ through His death. We have been crucified with Christ, which means that we have died to self and to sin. Galatians 5:24 says that because we belong to Christ, we have been crucified to the flesh with its desires and passions. That does not mean that we will no longer sin, but we now have the ability to resist sin. Our sinful desires have been

replaced with the desire to serve and obey God. We should desire sin less and less the more mature we become in Christ. Also, when we do sin, we should feel the conviction of the Spirit and we should feel sorrow over our sin, seeking repentance and forgiveness as soon as possible.

Second, we are united to Christ in life. Because we are in Christ and He is in us, we should want to live a life of obedience and submission. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commands." We don't obey Christ in order to earn our salvation, for salvation is a free gift of God. However, we were created to do good works (Ephesians 4:8-10). Our obedience to Christ is a way of showing our love for Him. It's motivated from gratitude and a desire to please Him.

Third, we are united to Christ by faith. Faith has to do with trusting someone that we believe to be reliable and capable of doing what He says. So, when we put our faith in Christ, we're simply saying that we trust Him. We are willing to submit to Him because we trust Him to care for us, and we believe that His way is best (Romans 8:28). We also trust that He is willing and able to save us. Both parts of that statement are important. It wouldn't do us any good if Jesus wanted to save us but didn't have the power. It would also be horrible if Jesus had the power to save but didn't want to. Thankfully, He does have the power and He does want to save, which leads us to our next point.

Fourth, we are united to Christ because of His love for us. We needed a perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins, and Jesus was the only one capable of meeting that need. He was the only one able to live the life of perfect obedience that we could not live. He was willing to fill that need and give Himself for us because He loves us. Jesus says in John 15 that He loves us in the same way that the Father loves Him (verse 9). What an amazing thought, that we are the recipient of that kind of love! He also says, "Greater love has no one that this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:13-14). Jesus actually considers us His friends, and He showed that by giving His life for us. We reciprocate that friendship by our obedience.

Because we are born sinful, we all need a makeover. To receive that spiritual makeover and become a new creation, we must be in Christ. We are united to Him through His death, in our life of obedience, by our faith in Him, because of His love for us.

Engage: What comes to your mind when you think about Jesus loving you enough to give Himself for you? How does that knowledge affect how you live each day?

Lesson Two: "If anyone is in Christ..."

We are united to Christ by our commitment to Him.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. (Matthew 16:24-27)

Have you ever heard of gamophobia? It's an extreme fear of commitment, especially to marriage. While the actual phobia may be rare, it seems that many people want the benefits of marriage without the commitment, so they just live together. Unfortunately, this refusal to commit has infiltrated the church. There are many people who want Jesus to save them from their sins, but they don't want to commit to Him as their Lord. So, carnal Christianity was invented. Proponents of this belief teach that it is possible to trust in Christ as your Savior without ever choosing to or even desiring to live a life of obedience to Him. However, the idea of carnal Christianity is in direct contradiction to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Yesterday we talked about how we are in Christ by being united with Him through His death. We were crucified with Christ and have died to self and to sin. Because we are united with Him, we should want to live for Him as a result of our love and gratitude. In fact, Jesus clearly says, "If you love me, you *will* keep my commands" (John 14:15, emphasis mine). The implication from this verse is, "If you don't keep my commands, you don't love me." That clearly calls for a commitment.

Jesus speaks even more explicitly on this subject in Matthew 16:24-27. In verse 24, He give three requirements for those who would be His disciples, or followers, all of which require a commitment on our part:

First, we must deny ourselves. According to Blue Letter Bible, the word *deny* means "to forget one's self, lose sight of one's self and one's own interests." When we are saved, we cannot continue to focus on ourselves. That doesn't mean that we can never follow our own dreams or do the things we want to do, but we must do it all to the glory of God (Colossians 3:17). If our desires are contrary to God's Word, then we must abandon them. If we are to be a disciple of Christ, we must forget about ourselves and our own desires, focusing instead on Christ.

Second, we must take up our cross, meaning we must seek God's will, no matter the cost. The implication is that being a disciple will cost you, and it requires being committed even to the point of death. There's no room in God's kingdom for those who merely give lip service to being a disciple. Jesus makes that clear when He says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will

enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Third, we must follow Him. The word *follow* implies becoming one’s disciple, and the word *disciple* means “learner.” So, we must learn from Christ and follow His example. Jesus says in John 8:12, “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” In order to truly follow Christ, we cannot continue to walk in darkness or sin. We must commit to becoming more like Jesus, which is what we were chosen for (Romans 8:29).

In Matthew 16:25-27, Jesus also gives three reasons of why we must commit to Him:

First, Jesus says, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (verse 25). Some people don’t want to commit to Christ because they are afraid of what He will ask of them. They’re afraid of losing their lives, of giving up their way of life or even being martyred. They choose to save their physical life, but, in the end, they lose eternal life. However, those who are willing to sacrifice their physical life will find that anything they lose here on Earth is nothing compared to an eternity in heaven.

Second, when we gain the world, we actually forfeit our soul (verse 26). Jesus is talking about here about seeking earthly treasure. However, those who cling to the things of this world rather than following Christ will eventually lose it all when they die. They won’t have the possessions or the power or the position that was so important to them on Earth, nor will they have eternal life. However, those whose focus is on building up their treasure in heaven will find that they have gained everything when they spend an eternity in heaven with God, even though they may not have had much on earth.

Third, when Christ returns, He will repay each of us for our deeds (verse 27). We are all going to face judgment one day. Those who are not in Christ will be condemned to an eternity in hell, while those who are in Christ will be rewarded (1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:11-15).

Based on these verses from Matthew 16, it seems clear that Jesus expects a commitment from His disciples. He expects us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Those who are in Christ will be rewarded with spiritual blessings and eternal life.

Engage: What are some practical ways that you can deny yourself, take up your cross, or follow Jesus in your daily life?

Lesson Three: “He is a new creation...”

We become a new creation by being born again (regeneration).

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

Under the cover of darkness, the man slipped through the quiet streets, seeking out the man everyone was talking about, the man who had dared drive the money changers out of the temple, and the one who had done many amazing signs (John 2). We don't know exactly what prompted Nicodemus to visit Jesus that night, but as a Pharisee, he probably didn't want to be seen talking to this new Rabbi. Maybe he was curious, wanting to see this man for himself to see if the rumors were true. Could this man possibly be the Messiah?

We quickly see that, although Nicodemus had a thorough knowledge of the Scripture, he was ignorant about spiritual matters. When Jesus says, “No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (John 3:3), Nicodemus' mind was stuck on the physical, asking “How can a person enter again into his mother's womb?” This shows how blinded people can be to the truth. Knowing *about* God is not the same as actually knowing Him. The only way people can see the truth of God's Word is if the Holy Spirit reveals it to them (1 Corinthians 2:14).

When Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again, He's referring to spiritual birth, a process called regeneration. He's basically telling Nicodemus that he must be made new if he wants any part of God's kingdom. We can read more about the process of regeneration in Ephesians 2:1-10.

First, we see our need for regeneration (verses 1-3). Paul describes an unbeliever as being dead in her sins, following the way of the world, living according to her own desires and passions. As a result, she is under the wrath of God. The problem is, because she is spiritually dead, she can do nothing to change her plight. A dead person is unable to choose life. For someone to be brought back from the dead, it requires an outside force to give that person life.

Think about Lazarus. He had been dead and buried for four days by the time Jesus arrived on the scene. Could Lazarus have chosen to come out of the grave on his own? No, of course not. It took Jesus calling for Him to come out, giving him new life, for Lazarus to rise again. That's the case with physical death, and the same is true for spiritual death. A spiritually dead person cannot choose spiritual life unless someone first gives them new life.

Jesus uses the example of birth. Did anyone choose to be born? No, a baby is not able to choose if or when it's born. The same is basically true of the new birth that Jesus talks about in John 3:3. Regeneration, or new birth, must come from outside of ourselves. If we can't choose life and if we can't choose to be born again on our own, then how can we ever be saved?

Going back to Ephesians 2, Paul reveals the source of regeneration in verses 4-5 and 8-9. He says that while we were dead, God made us alive. So, we see that God is the one who grants spiritual life, and He does that through the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that we must be born of the Spirit (John 3:5-8), and Paul writes that we are saved “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5-6). Regeneration occurs when the Holy Spirit removes our heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh, one that is able to see God’s kingdom and respond positively to it (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

This does not mean that we are completely passive in our salvation. Ephesians 4:8 says that we are saved by grace, which is when the Spirit gives us a new heart, but we are also saved by faith, which is when we respond to Christ by placing our trust in Him. The point is, though, that salvation is a gift of God. It’s not something that we can earn by our works, although it should result in good works, as we see in our next point.

In verses 6-7 and 10 of Ephesians 2, we see the results of regeneration. Most importantly, our salvation places us in Christ. We are raised with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places, which shows our union with Him. As a result of that union, we are then the recipients of God’s immeasurable grace. Our regeneration and salvation should also result in good works, because that is what God created us to do.

Because of our sinful nature, we must become new creations if we are to have a relationship with God. We need the Holy Spirit to bring us back to life and to cause us to be born again, if we are to be saved. Once we are in Christ, we should desire to obey God’s will for us.

Engage: What good works do you think that God has created you for?

Lesson Four: “He is a new creation...”

We are becoming new as we become more like Christ (sanctification).

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29)

I remember reading somewhere, “God loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way.” There’s a lot of truth in that statement. God loved us even while we were sinners. We don’t have to clean ourselves up before we can get saved. However, once we are saved, God does expect us to change, as we see in Romans 8:29, “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

There’s a lot of misunderstanding about this verse, I think. Some people are unclear about the meaning of the word “foreknew.” Just reading it, you may think that it just means “knew before,” but the meaning is actually deeper than that mere knowledge. It refers to God’s choosing to love us and have a relationship with us from before time began. There’s also some confusion about the word “predestined.” In this context, it just means that God decided something beforehand. So, this verse is saying, “God decided before they were even born that those whom He loved would be conformed to the image of His son.”

Yesterday, we talked about how we are made new through regeneration. Today, we’re going to talk about how we are being made new as we are being conformed to the image of Christ. This process is called sanctification.

On the one hand, sanctification is God’s work in us, because God gives us the desire and the ability to do His will (Philippians 2:13). Without God’s influence we would not even want to do the right thing, much less be able to make the right choices. We would all continue to follow our own sinful desires. However, God gives us the strength to do whatever He commands (Philippians 4:13). He has called us to be holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4), so He will give us what we need to accomplish that.

However, sanctification is also something we must work for. We must discipline ourselves to do God’s will (1 Timothy 4:7-8). It requires effort on our part to choose to take advantage of the power and strength at our disposal so that we can resist temptation and choose to do the right thing. It will be hard, and we will fail. A lot. But the longer we are saved and more we fight sin, the easier it becomes and the less we will fail.

How can we know what the right thing to do is? Jesus prays in John 17:17 that God would sanctify us in the truth of God’s Word. We must study the Scripture to know what God expects of us. We can read the Gospels to learn more about Christ, since it’s His image to which we are

to be conformed. If we are to become more like Christ, we must have a clear understanding of who He is.

However, we must not focus our attention just on the Gospels, or even just the New Testament. It's equally important to study the rest of Scripture, because all of Scripture points to Christ, and all Scripture is valuable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We must be familiar with the truth of God's Word if we are to become who He wants us to be.

Sanctification is a life-long process. We will fight against sin until we die, but over time the fight will get a little easier. One day we can look back over our lives and see how much we have really changed and how much more like Christ we have become.

Engage: How do you feel about the statement, "God loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way?" Why does God want us to change?

Lesson Five: “He is a new creation...”

We will not be perfectly new until we reach heaven (glorification).

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

Have you ever seen a child and known right away who he or she belonged to because that child was the spitting image of the parent? People often tell me that I look like my mom, which I take as a compliment, but children can’t actually control whether or not they look like their parents. Sometimes, though, we know who a child belongs to because of their behavior or mannerisms. They act just like their parent. Some of that behavior was learned and can actually be controlled.

Genesis 1:27 tells us that we were made in the image of God. The truth is, people should be able to tell who our Father is because of the way we act. We should be the spitting image of our heavenly Father, and we can learn to act like God.

The goal of Christianity is, in fact, to become perfect as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48). If that seems impossible to you, that’s because it is. Obviously, we’ll never reach perfection in this lifetime. Even though we were made new at the time of our salvation through regeneration, and even though we are being made new through sanctification, we will still always struggle with sin.

John writes in 1 John 3:2 that we are God’s children, but what we will be has not yet appeared. He’s saying that we are not yet reflecting God’s image as perfectly as we should. Paul understood that. He writes about his struggle with sin in Romans 7:18-20, where he says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” Does anyone else feel like Paul is describing your life in those verses? I am so aware of the daily struggle between doing the good that I want to do, but giving in the sin that I don’t want to do.

Although we will make progress, and we may overcome certain sins, sin will always dwell in us. That does not give us an excuse to give up, though. We are promised a way out of every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), but we must be looking for that way out. It’s important to daily put on the armor of God so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-18). We must walk according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), seeking guidance from the Spirit and the Word so that we know what to do in every situation. No matter how hard the battle with sin may seem, we must keep fighting, taking advantage of the resources that God given us to be victorious.

A New Creation

We may win some battles with sin, and we will lose some. The good news is, though, that we are promised to win the war. Going back to 1 John 3:2, we see that although what we will be has not appeared, when Christ returns, then we will be like Him. We can share Paul's confidence, when he writes, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). When we get tired of fighting we can look forward to our future glorification, when we will finally be made perfectly new and we can rest in Christ for all eternity.

Engage: How does it make you feel, knowing that you are not yet like Christ but will be one day?

Lesson Six: “The old has passed away...”

We should not want to follow our old sinful desires.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1-3)

Confession time: I was one of those geeky kids in high school. I wasn't an athlete or cheerleader or in band or anything cool like that. Instead I was on the Mock Trial Team, in the Honor Society, and in the Environmental Club. The Environmental Club was actually pretty cool, because we got to go on some really fun trips—to New Orleans, snorkeling with manatees of the coast of Florida, and white water rafting in West Virginia. That last trip wasn't all fun, though. The purpose of going to West Virginia was for a forestry competition. Part of the competition was tree identification, where we had to tell the type of tree by looking at the bark, leaves, and fruit.

You may be wondering where I'm going with that story, but there's actually a biblical application here about recognizing trees by their fruit. Jesus Himself said, “A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit...You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:18, 20). This passage actually became significant to me when I was a teenager because I went through a period of questioning my salvation. A lady from my church, who had been raised in church and was very faithful, came forward and said that she felt like she had not really been saved all those years, but now she wanted to be saved. That concerned me. I had been saved as a child, so I didn't have this dramatic conversion experience to fall back on for assurance. If this woman had been mistaken, maybe I was too. How could I really know that I was saved?

When I talked to my parents, my dad took me to the verses I just quoted. He told me that he couldn't know 100% for sure if I was saved, but that based on my fruit, he would guess that I was. As I examined my own heart, I realized that I was really saved, and I thank that God for that assurance.

The truth is, God has given us ways to test our own faith, and fruit is one of them. As Jesus said, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a diseased tree can't produce good fruit. People can fake their fruit for a while, so we can't always tell about someone else. However, we can't fool ourselves. We know what's in our own hearts, and we can tell if our fruit is rotten.

For a person that is in Christ and that has been made new, the old has passed away. They are no longer a bad tree, so they should produce good fruit. James states it this way: “Faith by

itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). It’s not enough to just say that we’re saved. Anyone can do that. If we are really saved, though, there should be some evidence.

In James 4:1-3, I see three fruit that we can check in ourselves to determine if we have really been made new:

First, we need to check our desires. James writes that people are at war with their passions (verse 1). The word “passions” is referring to a desire for pleasure, so the people are clearly just seeking to please themselves. So, to check your fruit, ask yourself, what are you passionate about? What do you want most in life? Are you just seeking pleasure? Do you want more money or more possessions? Do you want power or prestige? Or do you want to honor and glorify God in the things you do?

The second fruit that we should check is our reactions. According to James, when these people couldn’t get what they desired, they fought, quarreled, and even murdered (verse 2). Some questions to ask: What will you do to get what you desire? Are you willing to sin for what you want? How do you react when you can’t get what you want? Do you get angry or bitter? Or, do you realize that God has a purpose in everything? Do you trust Him to give you what is for your good and withhold what He knows you do not need?

The final fruit that we can check is our motives. James writes that people ask for things for the wrong reasons (verse 3). Why do you want the things that you want? Do you want them for your own selfish reasons? Or do you want use them to glorify God and help others?

Inspecting our own fruit can be painful. It’s hard to admit our sin. But if we are truly new creations in Christ, we should want to uproot the sin in our hearts. We should not want to follow our old sinful desires anymore. By asking ourselves a few tough questions, we can determine whether or not we are really in Christ and have truly become new.

Engage: In what ways do you fight against your own sinful desires? How have you been successful in overcoming your desires?

Lesson Seven: “The old has passed away...”

We should not live like the world around us.

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

The more time you spend around someone, the more you begin to act like them and talk like them. I’m from the South, but several years ago I moved to the Midwest. Unfortunately, I don’t talk much like a Southerner anymore, but when I talk on the phone to my mama, who has a pretty thick Southern accent, I can tell that my accent returns. It’s like her accent rubs off on me. Also, the longer that I’m married, the more I see my husband rubbing off on me. I now fold clothes the ways he does and put the toilet paper roll on the way he does. We may not always realize it, but we are definitely influenced by those around us.

Sometimes, other people’s influence on us is positive or neutral. But sometimes it can be very negative. I’m sure we’ve all heard it said of someone, “They just fell into the wrong crowd,” or something like that. The implication of that statement is that they aren’t really a bad person, but they were corrupted by the company that they kept. It’s true that bad company corrupts good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). That’s why we must be so careful to protect ourselves from worldly influences.

James writes about this in James 4:4, where he states, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” James makes it clear that those who love the things of the world are at odds with God.

First, James says that those in love with the world are actually having an affair with the world rather than remaining true to their love for God. This makes me think of the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. Jeremiah basically says that Israel and Judah were both sent into exile because of their adultery against God (Jeremiah 3:8). They cheated on God by constantly worshipping the idols of surrounding nations. They allowed the culture to influence them and draw them away from God.

If we are not careful, we will fall into the same sin as the Israelites. We may not worship real idols made of wood, but we also can be drawn away from God by following the culture. That’s why discernment is so important. We must be aware of what we’re being influenced by. We may think that something is harmless or that we won’t be swayed by certain things, so we go ahead and read that book, watch that movie, or hang out with those people. However, we must guard our hearts and minds because if we don’t, we will be led astray. Paul writes that we must

not be conformed to this world, but we should be transformed by renewing our minds so that we can test and see what is pleasing to God (Romans 12:2).

Paul also writes in Philippians 1:9-10, “It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.” We must continue to grow in our love for God. As we learn more about Him, we will be able to discern what’s excellent and reject what is not, thus remaining pure and blameless before God.

Going back to James 4:4, we also see that those who love the world are enemies of God. By choosing to love the things of the world we are actually waging war against God. We read in Philippians, “For many...walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Philippians 3:18-19). Those who choose this lifestyle are headed toward destruction rather than salvation. They follow their lusts and passions, seeking only worldly pleasure.

If we have been made new in Christ, then we should not want to live like the world around us. Our love for God should guide all that we do, rather than our love for the things of the world. We should be careful about what we allow to influence us so that we aren’t drawn away from our faith. As Paul writes, if we have been raised with Christ, we should seek the things that are above, not the things of this earth (Colossians 3:1-2).

Engage: How can you resist the temptation to love the world more than you love God? How can you develop a greater love for God?

Day Eight: “The old has passed away...”

We should not give in to the devil’s temptation.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

I’m sure that we’ve all seen cartoons where the character is trying to resist a certain temptation, and a little angel appears on one shoulder and a little devil on the other. The devil is always depicted wearing a red suit with a pointed tail and pitchfork. We laugh at this, knowing that Satan doesn’t really look like that. But the truth is, I think many of us are just as mistaken in our understanding of who Satan is. People either act as if he doesn’t exist at all, or they believe he has more power than he really does.

James says in James 4:7 that we are to resist the devil, which makes it clear that Satan is real. But what does the Bible teach about who Satan is and what he is capable of? Today I want to clear up a few common misconceptions about Satan. If we have an accurate understanding of who he is, I think it will be easier to resist him.

Some people see Satan as the equal opposite of God. By that I mean that they think that God is the ultimate good being and Satan is the ultimate evil being, but that they are on level ground, having equal power. However, we read in Scripture that Satan is actually a created being, an angel who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven (Ezekiel 28:13-16; Isaiah 14:12-15). As a created being, Satan cannot possibly possess the same power and abilities as God. In fact, we read in Job that Satan can only do what God allows him to do (Job 1:12, 2:6).

The fact that Satan is not a god is significant for at least three reasons. First, it means that Satan is not omniscient, or all-knowing. We tend to think that Satan knows all about us and can even read our minds, but that’s not true. Apparently, Satan actually believed that he could cause Job to sin against God by taking away his family, wealth, and health (Job 1:11, 2:4-5). However, Job proved Satan wrong by remaining faithful to God. Satan also believed that he could tempt Jesus to sin, but again, Satan was wrong (Matthew 4:1-11). Only God knows everything; only God is never wrong.

So, Satan really does not know all about you. He does not know your thoughts or your heart or your deepest desires. He cannot use those against you. He can observe you and learn about you by your words and actions. He can use that against you. Unlike God, though, he cannot see the future or the outcome of his attack. His victory is not guaranteed. We can stand against him.

Satan’s not being like god also means that he is not omnipresent, or everywhere at one time. It seems like some people think that Satan is everywhere, tormenting everyone at once. However, the Bible says, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8). We also read in Job, “The Lord said to Satan, “From where have

you come?” Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it” (Job 1:7). Satan prowls around, going to and fro, walking up and down on the earth. He, unlike God, can only be in one place at one time.

That means that Satan is probably not the one attacking you. I hate to break it to you, but you are not important enough to warrant an attack from Satan himself. He does have numerous demons at his disposal, and one of them may be tormenting you. But Satan is only in one place one a time.

Finally, Satan’s not being a god means that he is not omnipotent, or all-powerful. As I mentioned before, Satan can only do what God allows. He’s like a dog on a leash. It’s so comforting to know that everything is under God’s control, even Satan. He can’t hurt us or do anything to us without it being part of God’s plan.

Also, because he’s not omnipotent, Satan cannot win. He will be defeated one day. John writes that the reason that Jesus appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). John also writes that He that is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). As we look around at the evil in the world, it may seem like Satan is winning. However, Jesus is more powerful than Satan, and Jesus will be victorious in the end.

At times it may seem like Satan is relentless in his attacks. However, as we read in James 4:7, if we resist, Satan will flee. If we remember that Satan not all-knowing, he is not everywhere at once, and he is not all-powerful, it will make resisting much easier. Satan is already defeated.

Engage: What misconceptions have you had about Satan? How does knowing the truth help you resist him?

Day Nine: “The new has come...”

We must live worthy of our calling.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

One of my favorite movies when I was younger was *The Princess Diaries*. It’s about a normal, somewhat plain, somewhat awkward teenage girl who suddenly finds out that she’s a princess. Now, she has to learn how to walk and talk and dress and act like a princess. She has to live in a manner befitting her new life as a princess. I see a remarkable parallel here to our experience of becoming a Christian. We suddenly become princesses, daughters of the King of Kings, but then we have to learn how to act in a way that reflects our new life. That’s basically what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:1—we are to live or walk in a manner worthy of or befitting our calling.

What is our calling? How can we live worthy of it? Well, we see in Romans 8:29 that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. If we look at Ephesians 1:4, we see that we were chosen to be holy and blameless before God. The word holy here refers to moral purity, or doing what is right. The word blameless means being free of guilt, or not doing the wrong thing. That’s what we are called to do—to be more like Christ by doing what is right and not doing what is wrong.

In Ephesians 4:2-3, Paul lists five ways that we can be more like Christ:

First, he says we are to be humble. Some people equate humility with low self-esteem, or having a very low opinion of yourself. However, the best description I have heard of humility was written by C.S. Lewis, who said, “humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” The idea is to not think of yourself at all, not thinking too much of yourself or too little. Humility is about focusing on others and their needs, as we read in Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). If you’ve ever cared for a baby, you should be able to relate to this. You have to put the needs of the baby first. When the baby is hungry in the middle of the night, you ignore your need for sleep and you get up and feed it.

Of course, Jesus is the ultimate example of humility. We read about the humility of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8. Although He was equal to God, Jesus was willing to humble Himself by taking on the form of a lowly human and becoming obedient to the point of death. That’s the kind of humility that we are to strive for—being willing to give up everything for the good of another.

Next, Paul says we are to be gentle. Gentleness has to do with how we treat others. When we are gentle, we treat people with care, doing our best to not hurt or offend them. We should make people feel comfortable around us. Jesus is described as gentle many times. I especially like Matthew 11:28-30, where Jesus says that He is gentle and will provide rest for our weary souls. We should try to model Jesus' gentleness by doing what we can to make our presence restful for others.

Paul also writes that we are to be patient. There are two areas of our lives that require us to show patience. First, we must be patient in the midst of difficult situations. We must remain steadfast in our faith, persevering even when things get tough and we want to give up. Second, we must be patient when dealing with difficult people. We must be longsuffering, slow to anger or seek revenge. The best example of Jesus demonstrating patience is during His crucifixion. Even during this horrible situation, Jesus remained steadfast, focusing on His purpose, not giving up even though He could have at any point saved Himself from death. He also was patient with those who mistreated Him, even praying for their forgiveness as He hung on the cross. Considering that nothing we go through could ever be as terrible as what Jesus went through, we have no excuse for being impatient with our circumstances or with the people in our lives.

We should also be loving. Paul says we are to bear with one another in love. This is also translated as showing tolerance (NASB) or accepting (HCSB) one another. I want to be careful using the words tolerance and acceptance because I think they've been misused to try to force us to condone behavior that the Bible does not condone. It's ok to call sin, sin. And it's ok to confront others with their sin. We're told many times in Scripture that we should rebuke or confront those in sin in an effort to restore and lead them to repentance (Galatians 6:1, 1 Timothy 5:20, Luke 17:3; James 5:19-20). However, we are to do it out of love.

What Paul is saying is that we are to accept people for who they are rather than being disappointed or frustrated that they aren't who we think should be. We should be tolerant of other people with their quirks and idiosyncrasies rather than being critical or judgmental. You've probably heard, "love the sinner but hate the sin." I think that's what's in view. We don't have to overlook or condone sin, but we do have to be careful how we treat people who are sinners, because we ourselves are sinners in need of forgiveness. We must be willing to forgive others just as Christ forgave us.

Finally, we should maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The idea here is to focus on what we agree on and what binds us together as Christians, maintaining peace or harmony in spite of our many differences. Paul goes on to give a list of the things that we all have in common: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. We may disagree on certain points of doctrine, but we should at least agree on these things.

A New Creation

So here we have a picture of how we are to live as new creations in Christ—with humility, gentleness, patience, and love, maintaining peace and unity with our fellow Christians. This is a tall order, but with God's help we can fulfill our calling to become more like Christ.

Engage: How can you be more like Christ in possessing these characteristics?

Day Ten: “The new has come...”

We must renounce our old godless way of life and live godly lives.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

I’m not an athlete, but I have thought before that I would enjoy jogging, maybe even running a marathon. However, I can barely play chase with my kids without struggling to catch my breath. I know better than to sign up for a marathon until I’ve done some training. I could start by jogging a block or two, then work up to five, then ten, then a mile or two until I’m able to run well enough to complete a marathon.

In Titus 2:11-14, Paul talks about the need for spiritual training. We see two reasons that Jesus gave Himself for us, and two things that we should do as a result.

First, Jesus gave himself “to redeem us from all lawlessness.” The word *redeem* means to liberate by payment of a ransom. Jesus says, “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Of course, we all commit sin so we were all slaves to our sin. Christ payed with His own blood to set us free. We read in 1 Peter that we were ransomed, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

As a result, we should renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. To renounce means to reject or refuse something. We must reject the ways of the world, refusing to give in to our own sinful desires.

Second, Jesus gave himself “to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” 1 John 1:7 says that the blood of Christ cleanses us from our sin. The reason Jesus purchased us and cleansed us was to gain a people who are zealous for good works. As believers, we should want to obey Christ and do the right thing.

Therefore, we should live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. The word *self-controlled* means that we should live soberly (KJV) or sensibly (NASB). The word *upright* means living properly, doing what’s right. To sum it up, I think it’s saying that we should be wise, doing what’s right, what’s in keeping with God’s character.

So, Jesus died for us to redeem us and purify us from sin. As a result, we should renounce ungodliness and live godly lives. In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul says we are to put off the old self and put on the new self. But how? How do we do that?

Here are a few practical steps. First, we should identify which behaviors and attitudes we have that are still part of our old self. Then we should identify which behavior or attitude we can put on in its place. It's important to replace our sinful habits with new godly ones, or it will be too easy to fall back in that sin. For example, if we are trying to put off gossip, we might replace it with saying something positive or encouraging about the person we are tempted to gossip about. Once we've gotten our list of what we need to put off and what to put on, we should choose one to focus on at a time, so that we're not overwhelmed, trying to make too many changes at once. Then we should find a Bible verse to memorize that talks about what we want to put on. It's better to focus on the positive trait that you're trying to develop instead of the sin that you're trying to get rid of. Finally, make a list of practical things that you can do to stop doing the old thing and start doing the new. For example, going back to putting off gossip, one practical thing to do is to walk away when others start to gossip. That may help you resist the temptation to join in. Another would be to pray for those about whom you have heard gossip. It's hard to talk bad about someone when you're praying for them.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says that we *are* new creations. The old has already gone and the new has come. The truth is, we aren't the old sinful person any more so we shouldn't continue to act like it. We are already made new in Christ, so we must learn how to live in a way that reflects that.

Engage: Why must we train ourselves to renounce ungodliness and live a godly life? How can we do that?