

Lesson Five: New Life



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In this lesson we will look at the new life we live when we follow the way of Jesus. Keep in mind that these things do not work as a checklist in which we do one and move on. We grow in all these areas and continue to do so for the rest of our lives.



"Transformation"

New Creation

When we are saved, we are saved from being who we were. We are made a new creation and the old us is dead and gone. This is why Jesus says we must be "born again" (John 3:3, see also I Peter 1:3). We begin to love a new, full life that will last forever, but we don't wait until we die (John 10:10). We become human in a whole new way, by having a divine nature alongside our human nature (II Peter 1:4). God takes our personality and gives us a new purpose; making us a new version of ourselves. So being redeemed by Jesus means that we are made new in ways beyond our own power.

II Corinthians 5:17

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

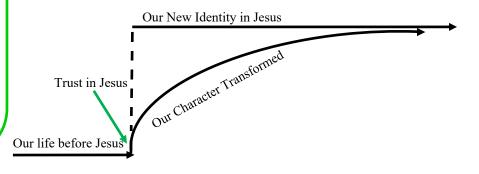


REFLECT

Do you and others see any change in you if you have started putting your trust in Jesus?

New Status, New Life

When we put all our trust in Jesus to forgive our sins, we are immediately granted a new status as fully right in God's eyes. In the last lesson we called this status "justification." We do not need to do anything to earn this status, instead we live in the light of the love God has already given us. God begins to work on our character, making us more like Jesus. We live a whole new life that comes more in line with who we already are in terms of status/ God's perspective. We call this process "sanctification" which means living for our God-given purpose.





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God will continue to work on us for our entire lives. There is no Christian who has "arrived" and is no longer growing in their life of following Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

The Bible also tells us to be transformed and in the original Greek language this was first written in, we would say, "Be being transformed"

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This means that we are always in process.

DISCUSS

What are some implications of knowing that walking with Jesus is a process that goes on for our whole life?

The Bible describes us all in a race. Some may have been running longer than others and are further down the road. While we are not actually in competition with each other, the Bible does say that we run as though we were trying to win the race.

I Corinthians 9:24

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

Running in order to win means two things: we make great effort to follow Jesus and we pay careful attention to obeying Jesus so that we "run according to the rules of the race." It does not mean that Christianity is actually a competition for who is the best follower of Jesus. If anything, we are competing against ourselves.

The topic of how we participate in what God is doing in our lives is a confusing one for us. On one hand, the Bible is clear that we do not work to earn, keep, payback, or no longer require God's grace to forgive and change us. On the other hand, we do not passively standby so that God changes us like a software update for our souls. Rather, God works in us and we respond.

Philippians 3:12

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.



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The Fruit of the Spirit

The Bible talks about us as having two conflicting aspects of ourselves: "flesh" and "spirit". The flesh is the human-only aspect of our selves, the part that pursues its own desires. The spirit is the divine part (II Peter 1:4) that God brings to life to do His will. Read Galatians 5:16-25 to see a description of the products of living for our own desires (the flesh) and the products of living according to God's guidance (the spirit).



Take a look at your life through the lens of the fruit of the spirit. Ask God for help in areas you see that need change.

Replacement

We cannot simply stop doing wrong and call that spiritual growth. Rather, the Bible says we are being made holy. Holy means we are set apart from the things in this world that bring death and pain into our relationship with God and others and we are given God's good purposes in life. Ephesians 4:25-32 show us that because we now have a new life, we do not only try to stop doing things but replace them with new ways. An analogy would be that to be healthy, we do not only stop eating junk food, we eat healthy food and get exercise. We also do not need to primarily focus on what not to do. If we are busy keeping our minds on Jesus and the things that bring us more full life in Him, the things that are life-taking will be naturally less and less influential in us.

Galatians 5:16

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.



Looking at Ephesians 4:25-32, think about what aspects of your former or current life need to be replaced. What new ways would replace them?



What is the difference between responding to God's work in our lives and trying to improve ourselves without Him?





What is an area of your character you need God to change? What can you do to participate in the change?



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	There is no magic button to grow spiritually; it takes hard work, painful sacrifice, multiple disciplines, and the transforming work of God. Here are general ways we can grow.
	 Connect with church community Get to know God in the Bible Spend time in prayer Serve others Endure suffering Take in Christian teaching
	Remember that these are ways to grow, not ways to be more accepted by God, which is taken care of already by Jesus.
	Which of these should/could you add into your life? How? REFLECT
	What is Christian Maturity?
	This lesson is a little vague about what we mean by maturing or growing in Christ. That is because it's not a checklist but an imitation of a person you are still getting to know—Jesus. However, we can describe Christian maturity as sacrificial love for God and others as we live God's purpose and help others do the same. We often expect a checklist or clear set of rules but that isn't what Christianity is about. If you want to assess your maturity, ask how much your life is still about you. We will talk about this in more detail in two later lessons.

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"Prayer"

Prayer

In the second lesson, we talked about time in the Bible getting to know God. In later lessons, we will discuss suffering, serving, and connecting in church community. As part of this lesson, we will talk about prayer.

Prayer is simple yet difficult. It is simple because all it is just talking with God. It is difficult because:

- We get distracted and busy.
- We think we aren't good enough to approach God.
- We have to surrender our control over situations.
- We don't always get clear or quick answers.



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Why do we pray?

- We can. We have an invitation into God's presence and we have the ear of the Almighty. We must not take the gift of prayer for granted.
- Jesus did. We read in the Bible that Jesus was constantly praying to the Father and He regularly did so during long nights alone. If even the Son of God prays, we who have been brought into relationship with God pray also.
- We must: not in the sense that we grudgingly obey a biblical command to pray but in the sense that anyone who has been redeemed and has the Holy Spirit in them have had our very nature changed. We "must" pray in the sense that we "must" breath or "must" spend time with one we love. We have a beautiful need for communicating with our Beloved.
- God desires to answer. Jesus teaches that God, our good Father, actually
 desires to give gifts to His children and wants us to come ask Him for
 what we need. God is actually glorified when we go to Him as our
 Provider and Parent.

Modes of Prayer

There are several general ways, or "modes" of praying. Each is for a somewhat different purpose. We may use any or all of these modes in a time of prayer:

Adoration

A prayer of worship to God. This is speaking the truth about who God is, enjoying Him and reminding yourself of the nature of your God.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is telling the truth about what God has done. It is key for healing and re-orienting ourselves and our view of our circumstances.

Confession

Confession is bringing our sin to God. It is telling the truth about our heart's condition. Confession should be specific and honest: God already knows the state of our heart and the acts of rebellion against Him we commit so when we come before Him we shouldn't hide. Remember that we need never hide from God. In confession we come to God for healing and help.

Petition

Petition is bringing our requests to God. It is telling the truth about your need. Remember that we are told to ask God for what we need and that we honor Him when we come to Him as our source. We need not be concerned that we are being selfish in asking for our own needs. We should pray for ourselves more, not less.

Intercession

Intercession is praying alongside or in the place of another person. It is telling the truth about what someone else needs. Intercession requires wisdom because sometimes what people ask for prayer for is not biblical or necessarily wise or helpful. Intercessory prayer also requires great persistence since we tend to be more motivated to pray for our own personal needs.

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Listening

A listening prayer is quieting the soul to hear from the Holy Spirit. This is probably the most difficult mode of prayer. It is difficult to quiet our minds and souls to be ready to hear from God. It is difficult to delineate God's voice from our own. Remember that God speaks to us primarily through His word in Scripture and nothing we believe He says to our heart will contradict Scripture. Also, God will not always speak to us internally during prayer. More often He will move us through understanding His word, listening to godly advice, and orchestrating our circumstances after we've prayed for guidance. God will move us over time as we pray over time more often than give us specific words of direction during prayer, however, a prayer of listening is pausing long enough to listen if He does choose to speak to our hearts.

Other types or times of prayer

Corporate

Corporate prayer is prayer together as the church community. Jesus says that wherever two or more are gathered in His name He is there with them (Matt. 18:20). Corporate prayer is often intimidating to newer believers but it is an excellent way to learn to pray and to connect with the church.

Daily/standard prayer

We have the opportunity to spend time with the Lord in prayer each day. Don't concern yourself with a specific amount of time but rather with having a focused time where you can fully be in prayer.

Quick/emergency

Sometimes we have only a second to quickly call out to God for help. This doesn't need to be in the midst of crisis; it may be before an unexpected conversation or confusion.

Extended/dedicated

At times we feel drawn to pray for an extended period. We may need to get away and pray for an hour or part of a day. Sometimes we wake up at night and the Lord may be beckoning us to pray. Sometimes we plan to have times like this but have no daily habit of prayer. Extended times of prayer should be in conjunction with daily prayer but not replace it.

Fasting

Some are confused or uncomfortable with the idea of fasting, yet we see it as a common practice in the Bible. Jesus Himself fasted and prayed.

Fasting is the act of denying ourselves something in order to focus on God in prayer. Typically and traditionally this is the denial of food. Fasting is not magical or a mystical secret formula for more successful prayer. So what does fasting do?

• Sets aside our flesh for a time so we can to focus the spirit. This may be for the sake of time but is more so about exercising rule over our flesh so that our appetite doesn't direct us. We walk a spiritual and not a physical walk and fasting is a way to remind ourselves of that. Fasting may make someone feel physically weak and tired which can draw us into a humble place of being conscious of our need for the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, the Father who gives us our daily bread, and the Spirit who sustains our life.

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- Creates a constant reminder to pray. When we fast we feel constantly hungry, especially after awhile, it's like a ribbon tied to your finger to help you remember your purpose of praying, no matter how busy you may be.
- Serves as a spiritual mourning over a situation. At times of sin or sorrow (whether our own or someone else's) we might fast as an act of mourning and seeking God. We are not wallowing or despairing in this act of mourning but are being honest about a difficulty and are setting aside life-giving food to prayerfully address a situation that has spiritually or physically brought death in order to speak with the Life-giver.

Fasting shouldn't be done to show how spiritual you are and should be kept private in order to curtail our tendency to show off or seek sympathy (Matt. 6:16-18).

It shouldn't be done to the risk of your health. If you have a medical reason to eat a certain way, consider fasting in a way other than with food. Also, going without water for an extended time is dangerous and many people drink water during a fast.

We can fast from things other than food such as TV, social media, music, sleep, or anything that we may need to disentangle ourselves from in order to be more free to seek God.

There is not a correct amount of time for a fast, however it should be long enough to make you hungry and give you time to pray.

If you have made a decision to fast for a time, don't force that decision on others. Allow them to choose whether or not to fast along with you.

Remember that fasting is a temporary break from something that is not morally wrong but that you are exercising mastery over. Sinful activities are not to be fasted from temporarily but permanently removed from our lives.

Praying in Jesus's name

We have a custom of saying, "In Jesus's name I pray" at the end of a prayer and there is nothing wrong with that, but we need to realize that it is not a magic phrase to make our prayer "work" or just the proper way to "sign off". Praying in the name of Jesus is actually a great grace in our lives since we are welcomed in to God's presence with all the rights Jesus Himself has to pray to the Father. We should remember as we enter into prayer that we are praying in Jesus's name and we should make our requests as we see Jesus doing.

Praying in Jesus' name is like praying with His nametag on. We get to approach God with total confidence, but we also pray for things that Jesus would pray for—some requests are not within the bounds of God's will for us.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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Spend at least 10 minutes a day praying each day this week. Don't worry about doing it "right".

Memory Verse: Philippians 2:13

(ESV) for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

(NLT) For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

	How should we approach God in prayer?
DISCUSS	

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How does what you've learned about prayer so far change your perspective?

Meditation

The Bible speaks about meditation in addition to prayer. Prayer and meditation are different in that prayer is direct communication with God while meditation is focused and deep thinking about the truths of God's word, His commands and promises (Ps. 119:48, 148) and His works (Ps. 77:12).

Our meditations are to be righteous ponderings on godly things (Ps. 19:14; Phil. 4:8).

Meditation in a Christian sense is not to empty the mind but rather to fix it on God, not to center our minds on ourselves but on God, not to erase the self but focus it on God, not to empty the mind but to set it on Him and His truth.

Part of meditating is what the Bible calls taking our thoughts captive, letting God bring our thinking back under His authority and exercising selfcontrol over what we think.

II Corinthians 10:5

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ

Along with taking our thoughts captive, the Bible says we keep our minds on the things of the Lord.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.



What are common areas of thought that you need to have brought under submission?

The Lord has new things for you as you experience life with Him. Trust Him to do His work in your life and see what He has for you! In the next lesson we will talk about difficulties in our lives.