

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on Themes from the Sermon "New is Better"

Day 1: The Victor's Crown

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

Devotional: The sermon opened with the declaration that death no longer holds a sting over those who are in Christ. Paul's words in this passage affirm that death has been swallowed up in victory through Jesus. The resurrection is not a distant theological concept -- it is the foundation of every breath you take as a believer. Whatever feels like it is defeating you today, remember that the One who conquered the grave is fighting on your behalf. Sit with this truth: the Victor's crown belongs to Jesus, and because you are in him, his victory is your victory.

Reflection: What area of your life needs to be surrendered to the One who has already overcome?

Practical Application: Write down one fear or burden you have been carrying and consciously hand it over to God in prayer today.

Day 2: Born Again, Not Just Better

Reading: John 3:1-8

Devotional: The sermon made a pointed distinction: salvation is not about becoming a better version of the old self. It is about being born again entirely. Nicodemus wrestled with this same confusion. Jesus explained that what is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is spirit. You cannot renovate a dead man into a living one. The only path forward is through spiritual rebirth. No resolution, no self-improvement program, and no religious routine can accomplish what only the Spirit of God can do. New life requires a new birth, and that birth comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Reflection: Are you trying to improve yourself, or have you surrendered yourself to be remade by God?

Practical Application: Spend time in honest prayer today, asking God to reveal any area where you are relying on self-effort rather than his transforming grace.

Day 3: The New Creation

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Devotional: The sermon anchored itself in 2 Corinthians 5:17, which declares that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation -- the old has gone and the new has come. This is not a gradual upgrade. It is a complete re-creation. The passage surrounding this verse also reveals the motivation behind it: the love of Christ compels us. God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, not counting people's sins against them. You are not defined by who you were. You are defined by what Christ has made you. The identity he gives you is permanent, purposeful, and rooted in his righteousness.

Reflection: Do you live as though you are a new creation, or do you still identify primarily with who you used to be?

Practical Application: Identify one old label or shame you have carried and replace it today with a truth from Scripture about who you are in Christ.

Day 4: It Is Never Too Late

Reading: Luke 23:39-43

Devotional: The sermon told the story of John, a 96-year-old man who came to faith after a lifetime of doubt and religious striving. This mirrors the story of the thief on the cross, who in his final moments turned to Jesus and received the promise of paradise. Neither the thief nor John had time to clean up their lives, earn their standing, or accumulate good works. They simply trusted. The grace of God is not limited by age, history, or the weight of past sin. If you have been telling yourself that you have waited too long or gone too far, the cross says otherwise.

Reflection: Is there someone in your life who you have given up on as being beyond the reach of God's grace?

Practical Application: Reach out to one person today who may not know Jesus. Invest time in them the way the sermon described -- with patience, presence, and the love of Christ.

Day 5: Remember the Cross

Reading: Luke 22:14-20

Devotional: The sermon closed with a call to remember. Jesus, at the Last Supper, broke bread and poured the cup and said plainly: do this to remember me. Remembering the cross is not a passive exercise. It is an act of worship that reorients your entire life. The New Covenant, sealed in the blood of Christ, means you have direct access to God. No mediator other than

Jesus is needed. No ritual earns your standing. The veil has been torn. As the sermon declared, the old way has passed. You can walk into the presence of God because of what Jesus accomplished. Do not let that become ordinary to you.

Reflection: When did you last sit quietly and meditate on what the cross cost Jesus and what it secured for you?

Practical Application: Set aside fifteen minutes today with no distractions. Read Luke 22:14-20 slowly, and allow gratitude for the cross to shape how you treat the people around you for the rest of the day.

Small Group Guide

"New Is Better" -- New Life Sunday

Overview

This sermon centered on the transforming power of salvation through Jesus Christ. Drawing from 2 Corinthians 5:17, the pastor challenged the congregation to move beyond simply trying to improve the old self and instead embrace the radical newness that comes through being born again in Christ. The story of John Anselmo, a 96-year-old man who came to saving faith after a lifetime of religious striving, served as a powerful illustration of the truth that God's grace knows no expiration date.

Key Takeaways

1. Salvation is not about becoming a better version of the old self. It is about being entirely remade as a new creation in Christ.
2. It is never too late to receive the grace of God. No one has out-sinned God's ability to save.
3. Religion without a relationship with Jesus Christ leads to hopelessness, not heaven.
4. Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward transformation -- a public declaration of death to the old self and resurrection into new life.

5. Communion is not a ritual but a deliberate act of remembrance, calling us back to the cross and what Christ accomplished there.
 6. When a person is made new in Christ, they receive a new mind (Romans 12:2), a new identity (Galatians 2:20), a new heart, and a new peace.
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Opening Question

Take a few minutes to go around the group. Share one thing in your life -- whether a possession, a habit, or a relationship -- where you have found that "new" was genuinely better than what came before. What made the difference?

Discussion Questions

On the Nature of Salvation

1. The pastor made a distinction between trying to fix the old self and being made into an entirely new creation. In your own words, what is the difference? Why does that distinction matter?
2. Have you ever caught yourself trying to improve your way into God's favor rather than resting in what Christ has already done? What did that look like, and where did it lead you?
3. The pastor used the image of a dead person being told to try harder. Why is that image such an accurate picture of what it looks like to pursue salvation through self-effort?

On John's Story

4. John described carrying decades of religious tradition as a weight he could not easily set down. Have you ever experienced something similar -- where background, upbringing, or past beliefs made it harder to fully trust Christ? How did you work through that?
5. John said, after his conversations with Pastor David, "I'm not who I was a month ago. I know so." What does that kind of certainty look like in your own life? Is there a moment you can point to where something genuinely changed?
6. The pastor expressed frustration that religion without relationship had led John to a place of hopelessness for most of his life. How can we as a church and as individuals

make sure we are pointing people toward a relationship with Christ rather than toward religious performance?

On Communion and Remembrance

7. The pastor emphasized that communion is meant to take us back to the cross intentionally and personally, not just as a habit or form. What practices help you keep the cross central in your daily life, not just during special services?
8. Jesus said, "Do this to remember me." What are the dangers of forgetting what the cross cost? What happens to our faith when the cross becomes familiar rather than transforming?

On Baptism and New Life

9. Baptism was described as a public symbol of dying to the old self and being raised into new life. Whether you have been baptized or not, what does it mean to you personally to identify publicly with the death and resurrection of Christ?
10. The pastor asked the congregation to look inward and honestly answer the question: "Have you ever been born again, or are you just trying to fix the old man yourself?" How would you answer that question today?

Practical Applications

This Week, Choose One:

- Identify one person in your life who, like John, may be carrying years of religious striving without ever having come to a personal relationship with Christ. Commit to praying for them daily this week, and ask God for an opportunity to invest time in that relationship.
- Spend time this week reading and reflecting on 2 Corinthians 5:17. Write down three specific ways your life looks different now than it did before you came to Christ. If you are not yet sure you have been made new, use this as a prompt to talk to a pastor or trusted believer.
- If you have been putting off baptism, use this week to take a concrete step toward following through. Reach out to a pastor, ask your questions, and do not let another season pass without acting on what the Spirit has been prompting.

- Reflect on your own tendency toward religious habit versus genuine relationship. Choose one practice this week -- prayer, Scripture reading, or serving someone -- and do it not out of obligation but as an intentional act of remembrance and gratitude for what Christ has done.
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Closing Reflection

The pastor closed with this thought: the grace of God is the most powerful thing in the world. It reached a 96-year-old man after a lifetime of doubt and striving and made him new. Take a moment before closing your group time to sit quietly and consider whether there is any area of your life where you are still striving in your own strength rather than resting in that grace. Close your time together in prayer, asking God to make real in each person's life the truth that in Christ, new is better.

The sermon emphasizes that salvation means becoming a 'new creature' in Christ rather than simply becoming a better version of your old self -- in what ways have you seen people, including yourself, fall into the trap of trying to fix the old self rather than surrendering fully to transformation in Christ?

John Anselmo, at 96 years old, wrestled with decades of religious devotion yet still felt uncertain about his eternal standing -- how does his story challenge or reshape your understanding of the difference between religion and a genuine relationship with Jesus?

The pastor expressed frustration and grief over how man-made religion can lead people toward hopelessness rather than toward Christ -- in what ways do you think the church can better communicate the gospel so that people are drawn into relationship rather than ritual?

2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that in Christ, old things pass away and all things become new -- what specific 'old things' in your own life have you found most difficult to release, and what does it look like practically to walk in that newness?

The story of the thief on the cross in Luke 23 illustrates that it is never too late to turn to Jesus -- how does this truth affect the way you view and engage with people in your life whom you may have written off as beyond the reach of God's grace?

The pastor described the Holy Spirit as the unseen force that draws people toward baptism, repentance, and surrender -- can you recall a moment in your own life when you sensed the Holy Spirit prompting you toward a step of faith, and how did you respond?

Communion was described not as a ritual but as a purposeful act of remembrance meant to bring believers back to the reality of the cross -- how intentional are you in approaching the

Lord's Supper with genuine reflection, and what practices help you guard against treating it as mere routine?

The sermon highlights that the New Covenant, referenced in Luke 22:20, means direct access to God through Christ without the need for a human mediator -- how fully do you take advantage of that direct access in your daily prayer life and relationship with God?

Romans 12:2 and Galatians 2:20 were cited as scriptures describing the new mind and new identity believers receive in Christ -- in practical terms, what does it look like to live out a new identity when your old habits, thought patterns, and past still feel very present?

The pastor challenged the congregation to be intentional about investing time in people around them who may not yet know Jesus, as illustrated by the relationship built with John -- who in your life right now might God be calling you to pursue with that same kind of patient, grace-filled investment?