

Forgiveness

Peace

2210

Leader's Guide

**Personal
growth**

**New
Beginning**

**Moving on
from the past**

2210

A Learning Track for all who want to change. The track will explain God's plan for life-long change and authentic redirection.

Designed for
one-on-one sessions
or small group study

By
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About the Author

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The background features a light blue and white pattern of interlocking puzzle pieces. A dark silhouette of a person is visible on the right side of the image.

Session 1

2210
Session 1

1 The reason for the title of this learning track:

Acts 22:10 says, " 'What shall I do, Lord?' " I asked.

Background: A man by the name of Saul had just seen his world blow apart.

Actually, to say he “saw it” is not accurate. He had been unexpectedly blinded so he saw nothing. He was more desperate, much more, than he had ever been in his life.

He had been a person very much in control of his own destiny – at least he thought.

--Good education/ even highly educated.

--Well-traveled and in touch with his culture.

--Highly esteemed by others; a leader.

--Very religious/ reared in a religious home.

He one time wrote:

Philippians 3:4-6

⁴ If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:
⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. NIV

However, there was a dark side to this man’s past.

His religious obsession permitted him to unleash a streak of violence against other people with whom he disagreed that led to some deaths. He had blood on his hands.

Ironically, as self-assured as he seemed, he always felt inadequate – like he didn’t measure up. He seemed to be running for a goal line that always kept moving.

He described his life one time as “wretched.” [**Romans 7:24**]

Despite his deep feelings of inadequacy on the inside, he put on quite a show to others. They thought he had it all together and was “successful.”

But now even that was gone. He was desperate!

He had an experience that would, from that day forward, be used to describe a single event changing the course of one's life forever.

In his own words:

Acts 22:3-10

³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' ⁸ " 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. " 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ " 'What shall I do, Lord?' " I asked. " NIV

--Terms we use today that come from this event.

"A Damascus Road experience"

"I saw the light!"

***Thought:** Light is different from darkness in its capacity to jar us or make us uncomfortable. Looking into bright light, such as the sun, demands constant shielding. Our eyes will gradually adjust to darkness, however, as they do at night when we sleep, and it actually becomes the preferred option after a period of time. The light that penetrates the comfortable darkness when the light switch is turned on in the morning is jarring and uncomfortable. Darkness is a biblical figure for the spiritual state that can become one's preferred existence. To live, however, in darkness is not the life for which you were created.*

Ephesians 4:17-19

¹⁷ ...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the **futility** of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are **darkened** in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having **lost all sensitivity**, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. NIV

***Question:** How is your life right now like living in darkness? How will it feel to suddenly see the light and be in the light? Be realistic. Have you had an experience recently that*

could be called a "Damascus Road" experience? Could your coming to the place in your life that you signed up for this learning track be your "Damascus Road" experience? Let's discuss the similarities and the differences with Saul's experience.

--As with Saul, such an experience, as devastating as it seems, is the moment life can change for the better.

From that day forward, Saul started an amazing journey with a new life.

Saul became the man who wrote many of the words of the New Testament. We know him better by who he became, the Apostle Paul.

--The experience on the road to Damascus remembered in **Acts 22:10** is the beginning point of Saul's new life.

--His life took on richness and his influence for good on others became so strong that even now we use it as a template for starting again.

It all started with his question of **Acts 22:10**– "What shall I do, Lord?" Here's praying that his question is now your question.

2 This learning track is for all who desperately want to change the course of their lives.

But how? Who knows? "I've tried before and nothing really changed. What will make this time different?" you think.

--Confused as ever!

--If sufficiently humbled, however, this time indeed could be different.

Question: *Are you at that point yet? Are you ready for your life to really change? Are you ready to listen, really listen, to the Lord?*

The Lord said to Saul: **"Get up!" [Acts 22:10]**

If you are ready to do that, you are ready to continue down this learning track.

Not everyone is ready. You may not be ready to let the Lord change everything in you that needs changing.

Thought: *Often we get used to being miserable. It's all we've ever really known or seen in others. There is a numbing normalcy to shared misery. In a way it can become almost comfortable. It can be our crutch, our excuse for a rotten disposition or just plain laziness. Harsh words? Yes, but listen to these words of Jesus...*

John 5:1-6

¹ Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵ One who was there had been an **invalid for thirty-eight years.** ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, **"Do you want to get well?"**
NIV

How could this poor man not want to get well?

*Before Jesus could change this man's life he had to ask:
"Do you want to get well?"*

It's not a given!

3 If you are ready...if you want to get well...if you are ready to "see the light"...
"Get up!" Let's go together!

My pledge to you:

Your pledge to me:

--Are you sure?

--There will be a cost!



Session 2

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Session 2

1 The first step you must take after “getting up” is to get into your heart.

Your “heart” means: not your head.

The head is obviously important and interconnected with the heart. You certainly will acquire knowledge upon which to act.

Acts 22:10

¹⁰ " 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked." " 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you **will be told** all that you have been assigned to do.' " NIV

But authentic life change does not come merely from head knowledge or the intellect.

Illustration: Your Mom, Dad, teacher or coach has said to you: “You know better than that!” You did, but “knowing” it and “doing” it are two different things.

Paul later described the common human dilemma this way...

Romans 7:14-15

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. NIV

The heart is your power core. The head will tell you where to go, but your heart will be the power to get you there.

Proverbs 4:23

²³ Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. NIV

God wants to fill both places.

--He wants to guide your head through His Word.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have **learned** and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. NIV

--He also wants to empower your heart through His Spirit.

Romans 8:5-11

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. NIV

Paul answered his own question regarding his and all humanity's dilemma...

Romans 7:24-25

²⁴ ...Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! NIV

2 Getting into your heart is not easy after all these years of living in your head [intellect and the 5 senses]. It will take practice.

The default position is living in the head.

Faith cannot live only in the head.

--Faith is seeing and knowing what is not evident to the 5 senses.

Hebrews 11:1

¹ Now faith is being sure of what we **hope** for and certain of what we **do not see**. NIV

The healthy, whole person is body, head, heart, and eternal soul.

Mark 12:30

³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. NIV

The Lord must have all of you if he is to remake you. You can't hold any part back from Him.

Don't hold back a single part of you from yourself.

Life will not be full until you become whole.

John 10:10

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. NIV

--You are not just a body.

--You are not just a head.

--You have a heart!

C. S. Lewis wrote: *“You don’t have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.”*

Do you want to be whole?

Do you want to continue?

A Heart Exercise: Think of a significant event or experience in your past and relate the facts.

Now, share from your heart the joy or the pain of the experience and why it impacted you to the point you remember it vividly now.

Describe the difference in “head” and “heart.”



Session 3

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Session 3

Review: The first step to real life change is to get into your heart.

1 The second step toward real life change is to look at yourself to discover who you really are. Take off the mask and stop pretending.

The Lord is looking at you personally and intimately. He doesn't do mass overhauls or offer generic invitations.

And if, by chance, you are accustomed to playing the victim, He will not be going to all the other people in your life who you think have "fouled you up."

Acts 22:10

¹⁰ " 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. " 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There **you** will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' " NIV

--This was an encounter of the close kind!

Let's get personal: Describe who **you** are, not what would appear on a résumé [achievements, occupation, etc.] or even failures or bad choices you have made. [addict, adulterer, etc.] Who are you at the core or the heart?

Your perception of core identity will determine the quality of your life and how you will function in life.

--Your expectations from life will be determined by your core identity.

--Your core identity also determines how you will get along with people.

2 Where do you go to get your true identity?

Many will continually look to others to give them identity.

Up to this point in your life the sources of your identity have come from:

--parents, brothers or sisters, other close relatives

--teachers, coaches, close friends, schoolmates

--the culture in which you grew up

--your religion

As a person, you have many dimensions:

Two psychologists developed what they called the Johari Window. (The name comes from the first names of the psychologists: Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham.)

The open self – what others can see

The hidden self – what other people cannot see

The blind self – what others see but you do not

The unknown self – what neither you nor anyone else sees
[The Johari Window]

Who can see all those selves at once? Only God.

The identity of ultimate importance to your emotional, physical, and spiritual health is the one known by God.

--More important than “self-image” is “God’s image” of you; what He sees and knows about you.

--Your true identity begins here:

Psalms 139:1-16

¹ O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.

⁵ You hem me in--behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;

the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be. NIV

3 The question on your mind right now probably is: What are the possibilities of a new identity after messing up so badly?

Saul (who became the apostle Paul) described in his letter to the church of Ephesus the grand possibilities of new identity when one becomes a Christian.
[Ephesians 1 & 2]

The apostle Paul's list:

- blessed in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing [1:3]
- chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in God's sight. [1:4]
- predestined to be adopted as his child through Jesus Christ [1:5]
- redemption through his blood [1:7]
- forgiven [1:7]
- sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit [1:13]
- alive together with Christ [2:5]
- raised up with Christ [2:6]
- seated with Christ in the heavenly realms [2:6]
- saved by his grace [2:8]
- God's workmanship [2:10]

--direct access to God through the Holy Spirit [2:18]

There are many, many other descriptions of one's new identity in the New Testament.

4 A new self-image begins with a new image given to you by God. The more this picture gets into your head, and from there on into your heart, the more you will grow like that picture.

Ephesians 3:20-21

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than **all we ask or imagine**, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. NIV

We must ask and imagine [visualize] a new life with God.

Assignment: Focus on the portrait of you that God and Christ painted.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! NIV

Romans 6:4

⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. NIV

Colossians 3:12-15

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. NIV

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. NIV

Exercise: Paint with words what a new identity would look like for you.

You were created with grand and noble possibilities.

Psalms 139:13-14

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well. NIV

Life and bad choices have marred the masterpiece.

God has been pursuing you all these years to bestow your new identity.

Have you noticed?

The background features a light blue and white pattern of interlocking puzzle pieces. A dark silhouette of a person is visible in the upper right corner, appearing to be in motion. The text 'Session 4' is centered in a bold, red, sans-serif font with a black outline.

Session 4

2210
Session 4

Review: The first step to real life change is to get into your heart.

The second step is to discover who you really are.

1 The next step in real life change is to ask the right question and listen for the Lord's direction.

Acts 22:10

¹⁰ " 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. " '**Get up,**' the Lord said, '**and go** into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' " NIV

This is just a beginning. But beginnings are vital! Someone observed that the most important part of a space shuttle's entire flight is the first two inches.

Observation: You have long believed the direct opposite idea to God's thinking of how to get your life right. The idea you had was to "get your house in order"... "clean up your act"... then go to God having been newly remodeled.

Reality: That time has never come and never will! Besides, it's not God's way! Scripture says: "**Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins...**" [**Acts 2:38**]. It doesn't say: "Renovate" and be baptized.

--Repent means to decide to go another direction, the direction for healthy change. You can do that!

--Renovation is a process that only God can do from the inside after you go to Him. It's a process. Allow the process to begin.

2 Case Study: The analogy of Lazarus

John 11:1-44

¹ Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ...³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ...⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. ⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." ...¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ...²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the

resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ...³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." NIV

Jesus will restore you to life. You will be reborn.

--Lazarus did nothing but conform to the reality.

--He did not raise himself from the grave.

But like Lazarus, you will still be dressed in the old grave clothes.

--The past still hangs around you.

--Your old patterns of thinking are still with you.

Jesus involved others to help remove the grave clothes.

--You will need the help of others to remove your grave clothes.

Before you can move on with new life, the past and old thinking, like grave clothes, must be removed.

--Jesus commanded: "Take off the grave clothes and let him go! "

--Because of Christ you will soon be "free to fly!"

3 When you internalize that you can have new life in Christ, your life will start reflecting a new reality.

Begin seeing yourself as God sees you.

Read Scripture, study Scripture, meditate, pray...but not to earn new life, but to learn how God sees you and to see new possibilities within yourself.

4 When you are baptized, from that moment, a new identity begins.

Acts 22:16

¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. NIV

Galatians 3:26-29

²⁶ You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. NIV

Some definitions: Baptism means "to bury." It comes from a Greek word (the language in which the New Testament was written). Baptism is a burial or immersion in water.

Acts 8:36-38

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. NIV

Why is it important that baptism is "burial?"

The word "gospel" means "good news."

Paul defined what he meant by the word "gospel."

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

¹ Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that **he was buried**, that **he was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures...NIV

The good news is that Christ willingly died in order to take upon Himself the full force of the punishment for your sin.

--Therefore, your debt is paid in full when you become a Christian.

Colossians 2:13-14

¹³ When you were dead in your sins..., God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. NIV

Ephesians 2:1-10

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. NIV

The good news is not just His death, however. The good news is that He arose from the grave victorious over sin and death itself.

Becoming a Christian is to identify with Christ so completely that we “obey” or “conform” to that gospel by dying, being buried and rising to new life.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not **obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. NIV

--Thus, baptism is burial in water.

--But it is also rising to a new life.

Colossians 2:12

¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. NIV

--Baptism is a living reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection—the essential elements of the gospel. [1 Corinthians. 15:1-4]

--We have been invited to actually and personally participate with Christ in the gospel or good news.

Romans 6:3-5

³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. NIV

5 So, like Lazarus have you taken your first steps from the tomb? For us that means:

Acceptance of Christ as new Master or Lord. [faith]

Decide to let Him change you from within. [repent]

Be washed from past sin and reborn as new person. [be baptized]

John 3:1-8

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**" ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**" ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." NIV

6 More about baptism

Baptism is also what puts you into the body or the church of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13

¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. NIV

7 We continue to participate with Christ by being an actual part of His body, the church.

The church is the living body of Christ on the earth: His hands, feet, eyes, ears.

Ephesians 1:22-23

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. NIV

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. NIV

1 Corinthians 12:27

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. NIV

The church is made up of all God's saved people.

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. NIV

Part of God's process of changing you is putting you into His church where you will be nurtured, fed, and protected.

Ephesians 5:29-30

²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- ³⁰ for we are members of his body. NIV

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. NIV

1 Peter 5:8

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. NIV

Caution: Don't try living the Christian life ...alone!

Remember: Let these Scriptures enter your mind, but also allow them to go further on into your heart!

In what ways do these Scriptures teach something different than your old ideas?

How is this study working for you?

Shall we continue?

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Session 5

2210
Session 5

Review: The first step to real life change is to get into your heart.

The second step is to discover who you really are.

The third step is to ask the right question and listen for the Lord's direction.

1 Real change that can be seen in your life by other people and that will last comes from deep within...

...caused by God's spirit working from inside-out.

Real and lasting change does not occur from "cleaning up your act" nor from the outside – inward.

Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. NIV

2 Fruit growing on a tree is not artificially attached to the branch.

It appears supernaturally, even mysteriously from within, by a power that is beyond human.

As if to remind us of this truth, this work of God is exhibited daily in nature.

John 15:1-8

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." NIV

Fruit will be seen and experienced by the work of God.

Galatians 5:22-23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. NIV

Real fruit is not positive thinking, pretense or merely "putting on a happy face."

3 Your role:

> Declare Jesus as your new and complete Lord.

Colossians 2:8-10

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. NIV

--This should be as public as possible. This declaration will help form and cement your new commitment. A secret commitment is of little value to changing your life.

--Jesus asked His followers to declare their new allegiance.

Matthew 16:13-16

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." NIV

Matthew 10:32-33

³² "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. NIV

--Declaring Christ as Lord is a necessary part of becoming a Christian.

Romans 10:9-10

⁹ ... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. NIV

>Begin living life with new hope and purpose.

Colossians 3:1-17

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. NIV

--Remember, however, that until Christ comes again we live in a sin-cursed world filled with temptation. You will never be able to stop battling sin.

--It is not a sign you are weak or a hypocrite to still have temptation.

Temptation is a strong desire to commit sin.

Temptation is not a sin. Jesus was tempted.

Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then

approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. NIV

--Though we learn Christian skills and learn to avoid evil, we will always fight a battle on two fronts:

(1) Against Satan and his allies.

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. NIV

James 4:7

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. NIV

(2) Against your own evil desires and inclination to sin.

James 1:13-15

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. NIV

--Through it all, be assured of God's grace because of Christ's death on the cross.

1 John 1:5-2:2

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

^{2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. NIV

Life Principle: Only that which is not acknowledged can enslave you and hold you in fear.

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

"Wake up, O sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you." NIV

Exercise: Think of those things that you hold as secrets of shame. What is keeping you from breaking free from the power they now have in your life?

--Anticipate God's spirit working inside of you powerfully.

--Each new day can be filled with God's opportunity for you regardless of past failure.

4 The Holy Spirit will actually guide and affirm your new life.

Romans 8:13-17

¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. NIV

Romans 8:26-27

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. NIV

5 The Holy Spirit is vital in your battle equipment.

Ephesians 6:10-18

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of

righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. NIV

6 Much of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives is a mystery.

Jesus compared the Spirit to “wind.”

John 3:8

⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. NIV

Some expect the work of the Spirit to be bold and dramatic as it was on the day of Pentecost when the church was established.

Acts 2:1-4

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. NIV

--However, you should not mistake the silent work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit's absence from your life.

--Fruit grows on trees silently and slowly, but it's powerful evidence of supernatural power.

This we know: If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit already lives within you. Allow Him to take more and more control of your daily life, daily decisions, and daily struggles.

Question: How is this different from your past concepts of Holy Spirit-filled people? What were some of the negative images of people who claimed the Holy Spirit for their lives? How would the Holy Spirit working in your heart change your life right now? How would your home and family be different if the Holy Spirit dwelt in you? What would be the difference for you at work?

If you are not a Christian, the Lord invites you to follow Him and receive the Holy Spirit as a gift.

Acts 2:38

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." NIV

Are you ready to receive the gift?

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Session 6

2210
Session 6

Continuing with the personal story of the Apostle Paul...

Acts 22:18

...¹⁸ and [Saul] saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' NIV

Saul was told by the Lord to take decisive action quickly!

1 Life change, while a life-long process, can and must begin quickly.

Reasons:

--Life is uncertain.

James 4:13-14

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. NIV

You don't even know about "tomorrow".

At best your life is like a mist.

--To realize the shortness of your time here will actually add vitality to your life.

Psalms 90:10,12

¹⁰ The length of our days is seventy years--or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
...¹² Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. NIV

Live like you're dying. You are!

An Exercise: Do you have a sense of time passing quickly? In what ways are you reminded of the years of your life being limited? What are three things you would change if you knew you had only a few months to live?

Set aside the trivial and pursue in life what will last into eternity.

2 Corinthians 4:18

¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. NIV

What in your life right now will live on into eternity?

--To delay is to decline.

Acts 24:25

²⁵ As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." NIV

Did he? No!

The impulse within your heart to change will only last for a brief time before you default to the old you...maybe forever.

What has brought you to this study and this moment? Could God be working in your life?

So, count the cost of following Jesus...but when it's counted...move quickly!

Acts 22:18

¹⁸ ... **'Quick!'** he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately...' NIV

2 Answering the impulse to change will require you to leave the familiar, the comfortable, everyone, and everything that will rob you of your new vision.

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." NIV

1 Peter 4:1-5

¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ² As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do-- living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

⁴ They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. NIV

This does not mean to abandon a covenant relationship [i.e. marriage] already established.

1 Corinthians 7:12-14

¹² To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. NIV

This does not mean to abandon family who need to see the example of a changed life in you.

Nor does it mean to withdraw from the world.

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

⁹ I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. NIV

It does mean "hating" behavior in people that threatens or weakens your new life. You are to still love the person as God does.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." NIV

--“Perfect” means “complete.” Be complete in your love as God is perfect or complete in His love.

--“Love” means to want the best for others and being willing to personally sacrifice for their good. It does not mean to “like” someone. We are not commanded to like but to love.

--Never excuse evil behavior or enable bad behavior in friends or family. That is not love. It may just be the easy way.

Your new life will mean letting relationships naturally diminish and not establishing new ones that discourage you from a new life with the Lord.

--The people closest to you have great power to take you up or bring you down.

1 Corinthians 15:33

³³ Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." NIV

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." NIV

3 Your new life will also include living before others with such quality of life that they will think more highly of Christ and Christians.

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." NIV

Remember: Just as you need models of what life can be...so do your old friends and family. Be there for them and be that model of a truly changed life. You can't have the same relationship as before, however. After all, you are a different person.

4 You will be living in a new environment. The people of this new environment will be:

New role models

--People who demonstrate how to live the authentic Christian life in the real world.

New image-shapers

--People who will affirm your new life and fortify your new identity.

New life-sharers

--People who will walk with you in Christian love and treat you with respect.

5 Christ means for His church to provide this new, loving environment.

Christ's church was established on the day of Pentecost shortly after His resurrection and ascension into heaven.

--The apostle Peter preached the first Christian sermon centering on God's preparation for that moment.

--The response from the listeners was immediate and heartfelt.

Acts 2:37

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" NIV

--Peter's answer...

Acts 2:38

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." NIV

They had been "called out" by the gospel or the "good news" of Jesus dying for the sins of the world.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. NIV

Peter preached the “good news” message on the first day of Pentecost after Christ’s going back into heaven. [Acts 2]

This is the same “good news” message we are to share in our time.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." NIV

All who accept this “good news” message about Christ form the church.

6 The word “church” comes from a Greek word [the language in which the New Testament was written] and it means: “the called-out.”

The idea is that a Christian is “called out” by God from the world.

--“Sanctify” is a related word that means set apart for the purpose of God.

--“Saint” comes from that Greek word and means one who has been set apart. All Christians are “saints” and are commonly addressed that way in the New Testament. For example,

Ephesians 1:1-2

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. NIV

MYTHBUSTER: The idea that a saint is someone very special who has died is unique to Roman Catholic doctrine. It has no biblical foundation.

The church is not a building or a place, but people who are called out by God.

--These people now make up the “body of Christ” on the earth.

Ephesians 1:22-23

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. NIV

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. NIV

This first church resulted when people committed to Jesus Christ as the new Lord of their lives.

--Their lives changed dramatically.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. NIV

The gospel ["good news"] spread throughout the world and even down through the centuries to us.

--The book of Acts in the New Testament is a history of the early expansion of the church.

--The letters or the "epistles" of the New Testament contain instructions sent by the apostles to these early churches.

These instructions remain the guide for church life, organization and mission.

7 You can be a member of this same church described in the New Testament.

What identifies a New Testament church?

--It conforms to the template of the New Testament.

Philippians 3:17

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. NIV

2 Timothy 1:13-14

¹³ What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. NIV

2 Thessalonians 2:15

¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. NIV

--The New Testament template includes not only the teachings but the love and mission of Christ.

Revelation 2:1-5

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: ² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." NIV

1 Corinthians 12:24-27

²⁴ ...God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. NIV

--The apostle Paul painted this word portrait of a healthy church:

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. NIV

8 There is a place in Christ's church for you! The church has been missing your gifts and your encouragement that only you can offer.

Romans 12:3-8

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. NIV

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching. NIV

Are you ready for your new environment?

Do you want to continue on this learning tract?

The background features a light blue and white pattern of interlocking puzzle pieces. A dark silhouette of a person is visible in the upper right corner, appearing to be in motion. The text 'Session 7' is centered in a bold, red, sans-serif font with a black outline.

Session 7

2210
Session 7

Review: The first step to real life change is to get into your heart.

The second step is to discover who you really are.

The third step is to ask the right question and listen for the Lord's direction.

The fourth step is the realization that real change comes from deep within and is the result of God's work and power.

There's one more step in the ultimate makeover process:

1 It's time to move beyond your past and start sharing God's gift to you with others.

First, let's be clear: You cannot forget your past. You have little or no control over what your brain chooses to remember and what it chooses to forget.

Likely you will not be able to forget your past, especially a traumatic one.

The Lord can make a painful past more bearable and can even use it for good.

--Paul never forgot his past.

--He often told his story of failure and grace.

1 Timothy 1:12-14

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. NIV

--His memories also included abuse and mistreatment inflicted by people he should have been able to trust.

2 Corinthians 11:24-26

²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. NIV

God can use your past (as bad as it might be) to form a new life mission.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. NIV

2 Follow Paul's model of turning a failed past into victory.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-9

¹ You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ² We had previously **suffered and been insulted** in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to **tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition**. ³ For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we **worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone** while we preached the gospel of God to you. NIV

(1) He did not consider his previous experience in Thessalonica a "failure."

--His previous experience, however, was very difficult.

Acts 17:1-15

¹ When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. ⁵ But the Jews **were jealous**; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, **formed a mob** and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the **city officials**, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all **defying Caesar's decrees**, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into **turmoil**. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. ¹⁰ **As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea**. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than

the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. ¹³ When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, **they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.** ¹⁴ **The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea.** ¹⁵ The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. NIV

Alternative ending: Write out how he might have responded.

In view of: Suffering and being insulted in Philippi--

In fact he didn't allow a bad prior experience to stop him.

Alternative ending:

In view of: Working hard day and night to support himself--

In fact he worked willingly as a mother for children.

Alternative ending:

In view of: disappointment in fellow Jews--

In fact he took risk of vulnerability and continued developing healthy relationships.

Alternative ending:

In view of: Many people in town being against him--

In fact he went to a new place hoping they would be more receptive .

Alternative ending:

In view of: Humiliation and danger. Having to escape by night--

In fact he continued true to his life's purpose.

Exercise: Think of your own painful experiences.

In view of:

In fact: Up to this point what would your reaction have been? Who would you choose to be your role model now?

3 In your new life, you can be a witness to others with difficult or tragic pasts:

Of God's goodness and mercy.

Of God's ability to make good come from bad.

Of God's ability to change any person from the inside-out.

Of God's desire that all be saved.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. NIV

4 What about forgiving people in your past?

It's important to understand "forgiveness."

What forgiveness is and isn't:

- (1) It's **not** forgetting. You have no control over your mind.
- (2) It's **not** a warm feeling toward an offender. Scripture says nothing about how you are supposed to "feel" when you obey. An offense may end warm feelings forever.
- (3) It's **not** blindly giving someone another chance to offend. It's not being stupid!

Matthew 10:16-17

¹⁶ I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ "Be on your guard against men..." NIV

Luke 13: 31-32

³¹ At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." ³² He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' " NIV

- (4) Forgiveness **is** realizing that the offending person sadly knows no better way.

Luke 23:34

³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. NIV

Acts 7:57-60

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of **a young man named Saul**. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. NIV

--Stephen's prayer had a major effect on at least one of the offenders.

- (5) Forgiveness **is** leaving punishment to God.

Romans 12:17-19

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. NIV

(6) Forgiveness **is** wanting the best for a penitent offender.

(7) Forgiveness **is** refusing to allow the offender to control your heart.

5 Your new life does not depend on another human being. It begins and ends with Christ.

Colossians 3:3

³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. NIV

Getting personal: As hard as it is to hear, what has kept you in this downward spiral is some form of *stinkin' thinkin'*! Being down may not be your fault, but staying down **is** your fault.

You have developed "thought patterns" over a long period of time.

It's the patterns that have been modeled by others important in your life.

The world also has its own patterns of thought that you soon learned.

Those thought patterns must be broken if healing is to occur!

Romans 12:2

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. NIV

6 The way to a new life is not putting on a happy face or pretending things are OK when they're not.

The answer lies in God changing us from the inside.

Our friend Saul, who became the apostle Paul, described the life you can have despite your past or current circumstances...

Philippians 4:4-9 (Paul wrote this from prison)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,

by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. NIV

This can be your new life!

Acts 22:16

¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. NIV

One last word...

As difficult as your personal situation may be at this point in your life, you must realize that sympathy is what you may want but it's the absolute last thing you need. Though Jesus had compassion for people, He never just sympathized with people. In other words, He never said, "I feel so sorry for you. You poor thing. How awful! You have been given a raw deal!" Instead, He boldly offered them an opportunity for a new life regardless of their present circumstances or past experiences; a great and noble life. Your life can change because **you can change with God's power**. Now is the time! It begins with one decision!

What will it be?

About the Author

Larry Suttle has degrees in Bible and Religious Education from Oklahoma Christian University and the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University. He has served as a campus minister at West Texas A & M University and Midwestern State University. He is currently the preaching minister of the 10th and Broad Church of Christ in Wichita Falls, Texas. He is married with two grown children.