

True You

2. Brand New

July 29-30, 2017

Welcome to week 2 of our series *True You*. We're looking at what God says in the Bible says about our true identity as followers of Jesus. Last week we saw that when we put our faith in Jesus, we become beloved children of God. That is the foundation of our lives. If you didn't get a chance to hear it, I'd suggest going to our website and listening. Today we're going to look at another part of our identity in Christ.

Let's take out our message outlines and please turn with me to **2 Corinthians 5**. At some point or other, most of us have wondered what it would be like to be someone else. I have imagined what it would be like to be a major league pitcher and to step onto the mound at PNC on a sunny day. Recently while standing in the TSA line at the airport, I've daydreamed what it's like to be whoever flies in those private jets.

The movie *Self/Less* is about starting over as someone else. The plot is that a company helps a dying real estate mogul transfer his consciousness into a healthy young body. I confess I haven't seen the movie, but the [trailer](#) contains some interesting spiritual parallels. The press releases say the movie shows that trying to engineer immortality by becoming someone else doesn't end well.

That doesn't seem to stop us from being interested in both immortality and new beginnings. That's because we are actually designed by God for both; not by our own engineering, but by God's power.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* So here is the second theme of our identity as followers of Jesus: **As a Christ-follower, you are a brand new creation.** The moment you put your faith in Jesus, something happens in you: you receive a new spirit inside. You may not feel anything, but the reality is that inwardly you are made new. **Colossians 2:13** says, *"You were dead in your sins ... [but] God made you alive with Christ."*

In the movie, the real estate mogul became different on the outside, but he was the same on the inside. In contrast, when you put your faith in Christ, you become different on the inside but you look the same on the outside. The mogul got a new body, but his spirit was the same. But when you come to Christ, it is the opposite: your body is the same, but you receive a new spirit. The true you is actually brand new.

Let's look at how the Apostle Paul was explaining that to the believers in the city of Corinth. **2 Cor. 5:11:** *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also*

plain to your conscience. Paul and his team knew God and they wanted others to know Jesus too. On their journeys, they visited Corinth and preached the good news about Jesus. Some people in town saw them as reliable messengers from God and listened to them. Others thought they were mentally off for talking about a guy rising from the dead. Paul said it didn't matter what other people thought; what mattered is that God knew the truth about who they were. "What we are is plain to God" ... Paul and his team hoped the believers in Corinth recognized the truth about them. Either way, God knew the true Paul.

2 Cor. 5:13-15 *If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.* Paul and his team are willing to let other people think they are crazy because they are serving God. If they were viewed as wise, that was good for the Corinthian believers. ¹⁴ *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.* ¹⁵ *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* This is Paul's motivation; it explains why they go to the trouble of preaching the good news even when some people reject them. The news that Jesus died and rose to give us a new life is so powerful that Paul was compelled to share it. **2 Cor, 5:16** *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*

The world judges people by surface realities: appearance, job title, wealth. Paul says that they don't do that anymore because they know the reality about a person is on the inside, where we relate to God.

Paul used to look even at Jesus from the outward appearance. For a while, Jesus was extremely popular. Crowds followed him everywhere. The media of his day would have said he had momentum and buzz. He was a success! But then, he was betrayed to his enemies and died on the cross as a common criminal, deserted by almost everybody. To Paul and most other people, Jesus looked like a loser. In fact, Paul tried to arrest his followers and stamp out the movement. Then, however, the risen Jesus appeared to Paul and his life changed. Paul understood who Jesus really was, and he went from trying to destroy the church to planting new churches in places like Corinth. He was made new inside and was never the same. So he says, "We don't judge people by outer appearances anymore." **2 Cor, 5:17** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

As a follower of Christ, the true you is a new creation! That is huge and it means **because of Jesus I can start over.** This is great news! I don't know anyone older than 4 who doesn't have some regrets, some things they'd change if they could. We all wish we could go back and do some things differently. We can't change the past, but we don't have to live chained to it. Jesus makes us

new inside, so we can put the past behind us and move into a new future. **We can release regret.** Regret is destructive.

Dave Ferguson writes about a guy in Canada who for two years belonged to a pool that bought lotto tickets and played the same number every day. One night he was looking at the winning number in the paper and his eyes got big. It was his number! The jackpot was \$3 million. But then as he looked for his ticket he realized he didn't have it. He had forgotten to renew his partnership in the pool so it ran out April 1, and this drawing was April 9. He went upstairs, found a gun and killed himself. ¹ Sometimes our regrets are so deep that we can't see a future. The real tragedy in this case is that the guy was mistaken; only four numbers matched his usual ticket, not six. So he killed himself over missing out of \$27.

We can't change our past, but we can change how we respond. We don't have to be stuck in a cycle of regret and figure that our lives are somewhat damaged. We can be forgiven and move into a new future. We might wish that we had done something differently, but because we are new creations, we can follow God's lead into the future.

Chuck Colson was a hard-charging high achiever. He became special counsel to President Nixon. Some people called him Nixon's hit man. Journalists called him an evil genius, and Colson said he was "valuable to the President ... because I was willing ... to be ruthless in getting things done." But Colson went too far and became snared in the Watergate scandal. The whole world was watching as he became the first administration member to go to prison. During this ordeal, some of Chuck's friends were telling him about Jesus Christ. As he was going to prison, Colson became a follower of Jesus. He became new inside!

Most people were highly skeptical. They viewed him by his outward appearance. The first reporter to interview him after his release from prison grilled him. He said, "Colson, I resent people who use Jesus to get out of a jam and then drop him and go on with their life. How do we know that this thing is real? Prove it to me." He stopped, thought for a minute, and he said, "The only thing I can say is, 'See what I'm doing ten years from now.'"

In 1976 Chuck started *Prison Fellowship*, which today is "the nation's largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families." Some of our men here at Crossroads have volunteered with PF. He also started Prison Fellowship International to focus on Christian worldview teaching and training around the world. He produced a daily radio commentary called BreakPoint, and was a principal signer of the document signed by leading Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholic leaders in the United States. Colson received 15 honorary

¹ *Starting Over*, by Dave and Jon Ferguson

doctorates. In 1993 he was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, which is given to a person who "has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension". He donated this \$1 million prize to further the work of Prison Fellowship, as he did all his speaking fees and royalties. In 2008, he was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President George W. Bush.

If Chuck had not realized that Christ made him new inside, he could have just figured his life was ruined. His law license had been revoked, he had been publicly humiliated and his reputation was in shreds. It would have been easy to give up. But Chuck knew that Christ had made him a new person inside, and so he followed Jesus into a new future!

You can too! You don't need to let your mistakes and sins define you. You are a new creation. Every day that you get up is a new start in Jesus.

Lamentations 3:23 *for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* Every morning we can start new. God's mercy and grace are here for us to start over.

Because we are made new, **we can change**. We don't have to replay the same habits and faults over and over again. To put it another way, there is no sin that you have to accept. You have a new nature inside, and your new nature isn't a slave to sin. **Romans 6:6** *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin"* The old nature you had that was selfish, lashed out in anger, or whatever else is no longer in charge! **Galatians 2:20** *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."* That means we can change.

If that is so, **why is change so hard?** One major reason is **habit**. We are used to reacting to life in a certain way, and old habits die hard.

When I was in high school, my English teacher was from England. He loved cricket, which is a little bit like baseball, but I don't think he had ever seen a baseball game. At our annual student/faculty softball game, Mr. Bartlett was fun to watch in the batter's box. He would run up and swing the bat like a cricket bat (kind of a cross between a golf shot and a baseball swing) swinging up from the ground. It didn't work too well for softball, but it was fun to watch! Mr. Bartlett was comfortable with cricket. Softball was a whole new ball game for him, but he only knew cricket, so he acted like a cricket player. It's all he knew.

When we start to follow Christ, we get a new nature, but the old nature is still hanging around, and it is familiar. We don't yet know how to live in the new one. We have the old tapes still running in our heads that say things like, "money is all that matters", or "getting drunk is really living", or whatever else. When we have created habits in our lives it is easy to stay in a rut. Spiritual growth is learning to live in our new nature by the leading of the Holy Spirit. That

is why you need to know you are actually new inside and you can get into the habit of flowing with your new nature. **Real change often happens in stages.** It's usually not instant and therefore, real change often takes time.

Bono, the lead singer of U2 said, "I have heard of people who have life-changing, miraculous turnarounds; people set free from addiction after a single prayer, relationships saved where both parties "let go, and let God." But it was not like that for me. For all that "I was lost, I am found," it is probably more accurate to say, "I was really lost. I'm a little less so at the moment." And then a little less and a little less again. That to me is the spiritual life. The slow reworking and rebooting the computer at regular intervals, reading the small print of the service manual. It has slowly rebuilt me in a better image. It has taken years, though, and it is not over yet."²

Another reason change is hard is that **it is easy to forget who we are.** Some are taught to say, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace..." I'm just a miserable sinner and I'll always be that way, but thank God he forgives me.

That's not really true. That's not the true story about you! Yes, we have all sinned, and yes God forgives us by grace, but when he does, we get a new nature and a new identity: that identity is saint! Listen to how Paul greets the believers in Corinth that he is writing to: **1 Cor. 1:2** *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be **saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.* He says they are called to be saints! That's not an accident! **2 Cor. 1:1** *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the **saints** who are in the whole of Achaia:*

That doesn't mean we're going to be in a stained glass window. The word "saint" means "set apart" or holy one. When you trust Christ, you are set apart; you belong to God. You have a new nature that is becoming like Jesus. Satan doesn't want you to realize this. When we fail, he will whisper to us, "See? You'll never change. You're just a miserable sinner after all." Yet, God tells us, "You are a new creation! You are one of my saints."

We're going to have uneven progress. We'll have success and failures, but we are brand new. You are a new creation but you need to learn to adjust to the new reality.

John Newton wrote the most famous hymn in history:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

² *U2 (with Neil McCormick), U2 by U2 (HarperCollins, 2006), p. 7*

Many today think the word “wretch” is a dramatic overstatement. But John Newton clearly did not. John was just 11 years old when he went on his first long sea voyage. He lost his first job because he couldn’t control his outbursts and behavior. He became known for that. He was forced in to the British Navy, but he rebelled against the discipline and deserted. He was caught, put in irons, flogged and nearly starved to death. He finally convinced authorities to let him go and join a slave trading ship. He became all the more arrogant and insubordinate. He lived with moral abandon. He said, "I sinned with a high hand, and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others."

One night his ship encountered an enormous storm and it looked like he would drown. He was tied to the mast to keep from being washed overboard and he thought back on his life. He had played around with God. He had lived without restraint. He had mocked the Gospel. As the storm raged, he thought he had sinned too much to have any hope of forgiveness. But when it looked like he’d certainly be killed, he desperately called out to God for mercy. It was the hour he first believed. He was starting over.

The storm passed, and John lived. He went back to the sea, and after a while, Newton went back to his old ways. He gave his lust full reign. Life wasn’t easy, though. At one point he was held captive for two years and suffered illness, starvation, exposure, and ridicule. He found a way out and back to the sea. Eventually he heard the Gospel again, and again thought he was too sinful to have a chance for God’s mercy. He had asked for mercy before and then fell away, over and over. Even so, he knelt down on the ground and asked to start over with God. He asked for grace he didn’t deserve. And God gave it to him.

In the years to come he went through a series of miraculous rescues from death by storm, starvation, mutiny plots, and slave uprisings. That convinced him that God was with him, because he should have died. Eventually, Newton became the captain of slave ships sailing from Africa to England. He made money, but as his faith grew he realized how wrong it was and so he quit.

Some years later, the proud, rebellious, lustful, inconsistent sailor became a pastor. He gave himself fully to telling others that they could start over because of the amazing grace of God. Newton became one of the influential pastors in the country, teaching and inspiring a generation of young pastors to preach the Gospel boldly. And he wrote that song about the amazing grace that saved a wretch like him.

You can start over. Today. Just ask Jesus to lead you and then follow him!