

A New Creation

Main Point

Being a follower of Jesus is not about *changing* your life, but about living a *new* life.

Scripture to Memorize

“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. All of this is from God.” – 2 Corinthians 5:17-8

There are choices that people make in their lives that might change the way they label themselves. For example, a person who gives up eating meat would be called a vegetarian. A person who passes the bar exam would be called a lawyer. These titles designate a change in behavior but not necessarily in *identity*. People aren't different because they have changed their eating habits or because of the careers they have chosen.

However, being “Catholic” should be more than about changing a few aspects of one's behavior. It is not just about being nicer to people we don't like or putting more in the collection basket at church (or even going to church more). Those are all *external* things. And while becoming a committed disciple of Christ does involve a change of our behaviors, the real transformation is what occurs on the inside.

A New Creation

St. Paul wrote, “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” St. Paul had some experience with this. Early in his life, he persecuted Christians, even to their death. After a vision of Jesus, his life was changed, and he became one of the greatest evangelists in the history of the Church.

In his letters, St. Paul frequently wrote that the change wasn't something *he* did, but that *God* did: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God changes lives. Perhaps you have had a conversion like St. Paul's, from one extreme to the other. But most people don't have that kind of dramatic story to tell. There are a lot of people who were already trying to live good lives before they encountered Christ in a deeper way. In some ways, those who were “good” can have a more difficult time conceptualizing being a “new creation.” “I'm not so bad,” they might say to themselves, “so why change everything?”

More Than Just a “Fix”

When I was teenager, I inherited my grandfather's 1976 Cutlass Supreme Oldsmobile. It was a big yellow boat that was built like a tank. I really loved that car, but it had one problem after another. Every few months I was back at the garage, paying for another repair. Finally, the mechanic said, “We can keep doing this for the next few months or even years, but honestly... you just need a new car.” It was a hard decision to give it up—it would have been easier if the car had completely

stopped working and I had no other choice!

This is why those whose lives have hit rock bottom are often more open to God transforming their lives than those who are still fooling themselves that they just need “a little fix.” Jesus doesn’t just want to *fix* us; he wants to make of us a “new creation.” He desires to not only restore us to the life he intended for us in the first place, but also to elevate us to live a life we could have never dreamed on our own.

Why? Because God loves us. He made us out of love. He made us *for* love. He made us *to* love. He wants us to experience the fullness of love, both in this life and in the next: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

Being Catholic is Being a Disciple

There are many who consider being Catholic like a kind of ethnicity or activity. Jesus wants it to be more than that. Being Catholic is being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is having an intimate relationship with the One who made us. It is not about getting a new paint job on the house; it is changing the foundation. This is not something we could possibly hope to do on our own—it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Reflection

1. As a Catholic, have you considered being a disciple of Christ as a part of our faith?

2. How do you feel when you hear that Jesus wants you to be a “new creation?”

Scripture Reading

The man who would come to be known as St. Peter, the first pope, was a simple fisherman named Simon from the small town of Capernaum... until Jesus got into his boat. Jesus invites him to a life beyond his imagination or his ability.

Read Luke 5:1-11.

Questions for Reflection

1. "They left everything and followed him." What do you need to "leave behind" in order to follow Jesus more closely?

2. Jesus invited Simon to become a "fisher of men." He took his natural gifts (being a fisherman) and transformed them for an eternal purpose. What natural gifts do you have that God wants to use to build his kingdom?

Faith into Life

Jesus invited Simon to "put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." This request went against everything that Simon had been trained to do as a fisherman. If he could not catch fish in shallow water before the sun rose, there was no way he would be able to do so in deep water in the middle of the day. I am so impressed by Simon's faith that led him to do what Jesus asked him to do. If it were me, I might have said something like, "Jesus, I love the religious stuff you talk about, but leave the fishing to me."

Often, we want to compartmentalize our faith into something we do every once in a while, like when we are on a retreat or maybe on Christmas and Easter. Do we bring Jesus into our places of work, our families, our thinking, or our spending? This is the kind of "foundational shift" to which Jesus is inviting us. Catholicism can't be an "add-on" to our already busy lives. Nobody has time to "add on" Jesus to his or her life... which is why we need a new life!

Break and Growth

This kind of transformation of our hearts is known as "conversion," or in Greek, *metanoia*. There are always two things involved in conversion: *break* and *growth*. We see this in the calling of St. Peter. In order to follow Jesus, he had to *break* with something he was currently doing. In his case,

being a fisherman. Scripture tells us that when he got back to the shore, he “left everything and followed him.”

However, there was also *growth*. Notice the way Jesus invited Simon to be his disciple: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” By inviting Simon to be a “fisher of men,” Jesus wasn’t denying everything that Simon had been doing up to that point. He could have said, “Simon, I don’t really need fishermen, so let’s start over.” Instead, he took something about which Simon was knowledgeable and passionate and *grew* that into something even greater.

We also see this in the conversion of St. Paul. He had to *break* from his persecution of Christianity—that was obvious. However, there was also *growth*. St. Paul had always loved the scriptures and preaching the faith. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus transformed his heart so that he would do it the right way.

Both are Present

In all of our conversions, there are elements of break and growth. For some, the *break* is the more dominant action, such as in the conversion of St. Augustine. For others, it is more about growth, such as in the story of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a young girl in France who was raised in a religious family and joined the Carmelites at the age of 15 (look up her story if you are not familiar with it!). Though one may be more dominant, both are always present.

Break and growth are also parts of any kind of serious, intimate relationship. As I fell more deeply in love with the woman who would become my wife, I had to break from other things—relationships with other women, behaviors that offended her, etc.—in order that we might grow in our relationship. God’s desire is that we would be in a love relationship with him. Falling more deeply in love with him is at the heart of true conversion.

God’s Work, Not Ours

Reflect on the last phrase of the verse to memorize this week: “All of this is from God.” St. Paul emphasized this when he wrote, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). Though we need to cooperate with God’s grace, it is *his* work, not ours. No surgeon, no matter how skilled, could give himself or herself a heart transplant. When we surrender to the Divine Physician, the Healer of our souls, he can make all things new.

Questions for Reflection

1. You might be seeing elements of deeper conversion in your life over the past few weeks as you have spent more time in prayer and discussion. What elements of break and growth do you see God working in your life?

2. In light of the readings and gatherings you've had so far, how has your understanding of your relationship with God changed?

Daily Readings

The following are Scripture readings to include in your prayer time throughout the week. You can choose to read them all at one time or split them up to read one each day. Consider the reflection question as you read each passage.

Being a "new creation": 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

God is doing something new: Isaiah 43:1-20

St. Paul's conversion: Acts 9:1-22

The prophecy of a "new covenant": Jeremiah 31:31-34

A "new heaven and a new earth": Revelation 21:1-7

Question for Reflection

1. In light of these readings, what does it mean for you to hear that God is making a "new creation" in you? Are there fruits of this that you have seen over the past few weeks?

A New Creation: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

“Jesus, thank you for not wanting to just fix our lives but make of us a ‘new creation.’ Holy Spirit, we ask you to show us the beauty of the life you have planned for us. (*Take a quiet moment.*) We give you this time together and ask for the grace to share openly and allow our hearts and minds to be transformed by your love.”

Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week’s resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **How did you do with the resolution to allow God to work through your weakness and accept his unconditional love?**

Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

1. As a Catholic, have you considered being a disciple of Christ as a part of our faith?
2. How do you feel when you hear that Jesus wants you to be a “new creation?”
3. “They left everything and followed him.” What do you need to “leave behind” in order to follow Jesus more closely?
4. Jesus invited Simon to become a “fisher of men.” He took his natural gifts (being a fisherman) and transformed them for an eternal purpose. What natural gifts do you have that God wants to use to build his kingdom?
5. You might be seeing elements of deeper conversion in your life over the past few weeks as you have spent more time in prayer and discussion. What elements of break and growth do you see God working in your life?
6. In light of the readings and the gatherings you’ve had so far, how has your understanding of your relationship with God changed?
7. In light of these readings, what does it mean for you to hear that God is making a “new creation” in you? Are there fruits of this that you have seen over the past few weeks?

Resolution and Commitment *(five-10 minutes)*

Read the following reflection out loud:

“Sometimes when we hear of God wanting to transform our lives in such a radical way, it can be scary. He tells us in Scripture: ‘Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the wilderness I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers’ (Isaiah 43:18-19). If he promises to help us find our way in a scary, overgrown place like the wilderness and create a miracle of rivers in a desert, won’t he also find a way to do a great new thing in our lives as well?”

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss:

For this next week, identify one or two areas in your life that God is inviting you to allow him to “make new.” What can you do to surrender those places to God this week?

Closing Prayer *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.