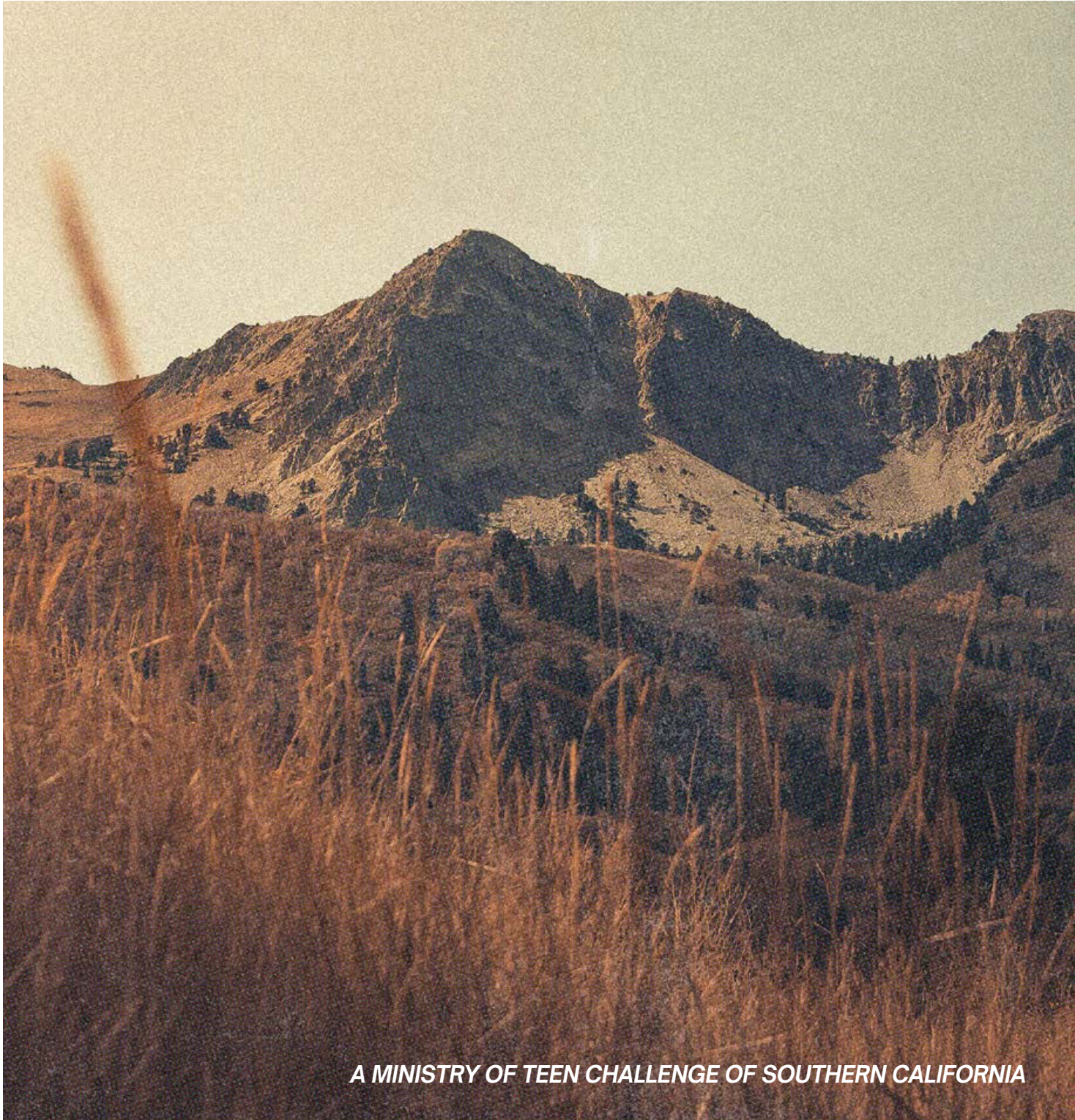


Chapter 1:

FINDING NEW LIFE WHEN YOU'VE LOST YOURSELF



A NEW LIFE COMMUNITY CURRICULUM SERIES

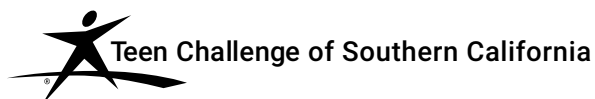


A MINISTRY OF TEEN CHALLENGE OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Chapter 1:
**FINDING NEW LIFE WHEN YOU'VE
LOST YOURSELF**

**BY: RON BROWN, NOLAN CROOKS, LAUREN KERN,
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New Life Community Curriculum

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Chapter 1:

Finding New Life When You've Lost Yourself

Certainly we cannot claim a magical cure for addiction. The devil which hides in the needle, the pills and the powder, is so deadly strong that any such claim would be foolish. All we can say is that we have found a power that captures a person more strongly than narcotics; but, He captures only to liberate.

—David Wilkerson

Welcome to the first chapter of our journey towards transformation and a new life in Christ. This curriculum is designed to help you find freedom from addiction and discover a life filled with purpose and hope.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”
2 Corinthians 5:17

Addiction can feel like a relentless force, consuming our thoughts, actions, and very identity. It often leaves us feeling lost, hopeless, and disconnected from who we truly are. But there is hope. The message of the Gospel is one of radical transformation: A complete renewal that starts from within and works its way out into every aspect of our lives.

In this chapter, we'll explore what it means to find new life in Christ, especially in the context of overcoming addiction. We'll look at key Scriptures that speak to our identity as new creations, examine the power of God to transform even the most broken areas of our lives, and consider practical steps towards embracing this new life in Jesus.

Remember, this journey is not about perfection, but progress. It's about daily surrendering our old selves and embracing the new life Christ offers. As we begin, let's consider these words from the Apostle Paul:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
Galatians 2:20

This verse encapsulates the heart of what we'll be exploring: **A life no longer defined by our past or our struggles, but by Christ himself living in and through us.**



As we dive into this material, approach it with an open heart and mind. Be honest with yourself and with God. The path to transformation often begins with acknowledging our need for change and our inability to change on our own. Let's begin this journey together, trusting in the power of God to make all things new.

As we begin, take a moment to reflect on where you are in your journey. What brought you to this point? What are your hopes as you start this community gathering? Remember, no matter where you're starting from, God's power to transform lives is greater than any addiction or struggle we face.

Ryan's Story



Ryan's story began in a place of deep brokenness. *"I started using heroin when I was about 19 years old,"* he recalls. *"In one way, I wanted to escape the reality of who I was and wanted to be someone else."* This longing led him down a dark path of addiction and destruction, leaving him unrecognizable even to himself. *"I remember sitting in a cell around Thanksgiving, thinking, 'What has my life come to?' When I looked in the mirror, I didn't even recognize the guy staring back at me."*

Ryan's mom, a woman of unwavering faith, saw through the facade. One day, she caught him trying to get high before work. Desperate and tearful, she called him and asked, *"Ryan, how do you want me to bury you?"* Her question pierced his heart. Though Ryan continued down his destructive path, he says, *"I had a mother who never stopped praying for me. When I think about her prayers and her desire for me to come to know the Lord, I see God's hand in it."*

One pivotal moment came when Ryan called his dad and said, *"Hey Dad, I think I'm ready to try something different. I need help."* His dad picked him up the next day and brought him to Teen Challenge, where Ryan encountered something unexpected. *"I realized that Christianity and Jesus were not just a crutch people use, but literally Jesus was a doctor for those who were sick."*

At a Teen Challenge event, Ryan found himself alone on a hillside, reflecting on the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. He knew he didn't want his transformation to be temporary. *"I didn't want this to just be a fad or a season. I wanted to be the good soil that the seed of the Gospel would be planted into and produce fruit in my life."*



I had a mother who never stopped praying for me. When I think about her prayers and her desire for me to come to know the Lord, I see God's hand in it.



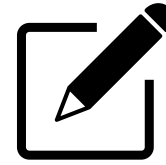
From that moment, God began to reshape Ryan's heart and life. "Through violence and frustration and pride, God brought humility, uprightness, and a calm spirit into my life." Little by little, he was led into a life of purpose and ultimately called into full-time ministry.

Ryan's journey from heroin addiction to ministry is a testament to God's transformative power. As he puts it, "God does have a plan and a purpose for your life, and He's going to use it for His kingdom. You might not see it at times, but in the end, you'll realize that God redeemed you for His glory."



Break in the Journey

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions



- What do you think first led you into addiction or destructive patterns? What part of your life felt broken or empty at that time?
- Have you ever had a moment or conversation that woke you up to how serious your situation was? How did you respond?
- What does taking the first step toward change look like for you right now? Who could you reach out to for help?
- What do you believe God's purpose is for your life? How might your past struggles actually become part of your testimony to help others?
- Who in your life has prayed for you, encouraged you, or believed in you even when you couldn't believe in yourself? How does that impact you today?

The Process of Transformation

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Romans 12:2

Transformation is the profound, holistic change that happens when we surrender our lives to Jesus. It's not merely behavior modification, but a complete renewal of our mind, heart, and spirit. This can only happen through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God's power to transform is truly remarkable. He doesn't just patch up our brokenness or temporarily relieve our pain; He completely renews us from the inside out. Where we see chaos and hopelessness, God sees an opportunity for redemption. He takes the shattered pieces of our lives — our failures, our addictions, our deepest wounds — and skillfully crafts them into a beautiful mosaic of purpose and hope. This divine transformation restores our dignity as His beloved children and gives our lives meaning beyond what we could have imagined.

Mike Conway learned the value of having a broken heart before God and allowing Him to be the focus of his life,



God loved me enough to let me get to that place where once again I needed a miracle.” What Mike discovered was that, “God doesn’t just save drug addicts and gang members and sinners. He saves Christians too. What I learned was there’s always hope and my Father loves me.



“My brokenness doesn’t mean something’s wrong with me. What I’ve discovered is that my brokenness is actually an invitation to intimacy with the Father. I don’t have to be fixed. I can be broken. And that’s okay.”

Transformation is both a moment and an ongoing process. God’s grace is abundant as we navigate this journey, even when we stumble. Remember, there’s no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

This transformative work happens in three stages:

1. Initial Change: The Moment We Accept Christ

This is the pivotal moment of conversion, often referred to as being “born again” (John 3:3). It’s a supernatural act of God that causes us to pass from death to life (John 5:24).

Key aspects:

- Justification: We are declared righteous before God (Romans 5:1)
- Regeneration: We receive a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Adoption: We become children of God (Galatians 4:5)
- Indwelling of the Holy Spirit: God’s Spirit comes to live in us (1 Corinthians 6:19)

This change is instantaneous and complete in terms of our standing before God. However, it’s just the beginning of our journey of transformation.

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”
2 Corinthians 5:17*



2. Ongoing Sanctification: Daily Growth and Change

Sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming more like Christ in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. It's a collaborative work between us and the Holy Spirit.

What to remember about sanctification:

- It's progressive: It happens over time, not all at once (Philippians 1:6)
- It's active: It requires our participation (Philippians 2:12-13)
- It's holistic: It affects every area of our lives (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
- It's relational: It deepens our relationship with God (John 15:4-5)

This process involves daily choices to surrender to God, resist temptation, renew our minds, and walk in obedience.

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 3:18

3. Ultimate Transformation: When We See Christ Face to Face

This refers to our final glorification, which occurs when Jesus returns or when we go to be with Him. At this point, our transformation will be complete.

What this means:

- Physical transformation: We'll receive glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)
- Moral perfection: We'll be free from the presence of sin (Revelation 21:27)
- Complete knowledge: We'll know fully, even as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12)
- Eternal communion with God: We'll see God face-to-face (Revelation 22:4)

What a revelation — to be with God for eternity! When you are struggling, broken, in the pit (and maybe that's this very moment), let this image of the future fuel you with the hope and motivation you need to keep going. Our present difficulties are temporary, and God faithfully works towards our ultimate glorification. This eternal perspective can fuel our perseverance in the ongoing process of sanctification.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:2

When Christ transforms us, we enter a life filled with meaning, substance, and fulfillment. We discover our true purpose as children of God and members of His family. Not only that, but we become part of the greater body of Christ, connected to believers worldwide and throughout history, each playing a unique role in God's grand plan of redemption for the whole world.



Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

- In what ways has your identity been shaped by your past struggles or addictions? How does the concept of being a son or daughter of God change your perspective?
- If 2 Corinthians 5:17 is true, what are the implications in your life today?
- The chapter discusses three stages of transformation: initial change, ongoing sanctification, and ultimate transformation. Where do you feel you are in this process, and what challenges are you facing?



Break in the Journey

A New Identity in Christ

Identity is what you believe (or don't believe) about yourself. It shapes your thoughts, actions, and expectations.

Once you've experienced transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit, the truth of your identity is that you are His. Your foundation as a son or daughter of God must be how you build your identity.

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”
Romans 8:15

Take a moment and consider the profound meaning behind this verse. Paul is introducing us to a revolutionary concept: Our adoption into God's family. In Roman culture, adopted children were granted the same rights and privileges as biological children. Similarly, God is offering us full status as His children, with all the benefits.



“Abba” is an Aramaic term that Jesus used when addressing God, while “Father” is the Greek equivalent. This combination suggests an intimate, personal relationship with God. It’s as if we’re being invited to address God in the most familiar and affectionate terms possible.

“I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”

1 John 2:12

Our forgiveness is not based on our efforts, but on the name and work of Jesus. It’s a powerful affirmation of our new identity in Him. As Ron Brown, Executive Director of Teen Challenge of Southern California, points out, “It’s from the place of sonship that we’re able to walk into the fullness of God’s plan, purpose, and identity.” Our identity as God’s children becomes the foundation from which we live out our faith and pursue transformation — you are now forgiven and adopted children of God!

This new identity as God’s adopted children transforms our entire approach to faith. We’re no longer bound by fear or a sense of unworthiness. Instead, we can confidently approach God, knowing we belong to Him. This understanding of our place in God’s family becomes the foundation for our transformed life in Christ. It shapes how we view ourselves, how we relate to God, and how we live out our faith daily.

If you believe that you’re always going to be an addict and a broken person, transformation is going to be hard to experience. But if you believe that God calls you His son, His daughter — that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you — then transformation and freedom will come naturally.

“[When we become a new creation], the anointing of the Holy Spirit manifests in our lives, and it connects us to our new identity.”

—Ron Brown

God can transform every aspect of our lives:

- **Heart:** Our desires and motivations
- **Mind:** Our thoughts and beliefs
- **Life:** Our actions and habits
- **Family:** Our relationships and influence

The key is surrendering each area to God and His Holy Spirit to begin renewing our minds.

The Renewing of Your Mind

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

Colossians 3:1–3

A crucial aspect of your transformation in Christ is the renewal of your mind. This isn't just positive thinking or self-help; it's a fundamental shift in our thought patterns and focus, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This verse from Colossians challenges us to redirect our focus from earthly concerns to heavenly realities. But what does this mean practically? It involves consciously choosing to dwell on God's truth, His promises, and His character, rather than being consumed by our struggles, fears, or worldly desires.

The process of renewing our minds is transformative, as Romans 12:2 tells us, *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”*

This transformation isn't superficial; it's a deep, internal change that affects every aspect of our being.

“Without a heart transformed by the grace of Christ, we just continue to manage external and internal darkness.”

—Matt Chandler, The Explicit Gospel

True change comes from within, as God's grace renews our minds and transforms our hearts.

This renewal will require vigilance on your part. Renewing our mind isn't a one-time event, but an ongoing process that requires alertness and honest self-assessment. We must actively resist negative thought patterns, lies from the enemy, and worldly influences that seek to pull us back into old ways of thinking.

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

1 Peter 5:8–9

So, how can God transform our hearts, minds, lives, and families through this process of mental renewal?

- **Heart Transformation:** As we focus on God’s love and grace, our desires and motivations begin to align with His.
- **Mind Transformation:** Our thought patterns and beliefs are reshaped by meditating on Scripture and God’s truth.
- **Life Transformation:** As our mind is renewed, our actions and habits naturally change, reflecting our new focus on Christ.
- **Family Transformation:** Our renewed mindset impacts our relationships, potentially influencing our family with God’s love and truth.

Remember, this renewal is not something we achieve through sheer willpower. It’s a collaborative process between us and the Holy Spirit. As we actively set our minds on things above and open ourselves to God’s work in us, He faithfully transforms us from the inside out.



Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

- Paul describes our adoption into God’s family in Romans 8:15, highlighting that we can call God “Abba, Father.” How does this intimate and personal relationship with God influence how you view yourself and your identity? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to fully embrace your identity as God’s child?
- 1 John 2:12 reminds us that our sins are forgiven on account of Jesus’ name. How does knowing you are forgiven and adopted by God impact your daily life? Are there areas where you still struggle to accept His forgiveness and freedom?
- God transforms our hearts, minds, lives, and families when we surrender to Him. Which of these areas are you currently seeing God work in the most? Which area do you feel needs more of His transforming power? What steps can you take to invite the Holy Spirit into that area?
- 1 Peter 5:8–9 warns us to be alert and resist the enemy. What negative thought patterns, lies, or worldly influences are you currently facing? How can you stand firm in your faith and actively resist them? Consider how Scripture, prayer, or godly community can support you in this.



Sharing Your Transformation

When God transforms your life, it's meant to be shared. Let's read Mark 5:1–20 together and focus on a few verses:

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.

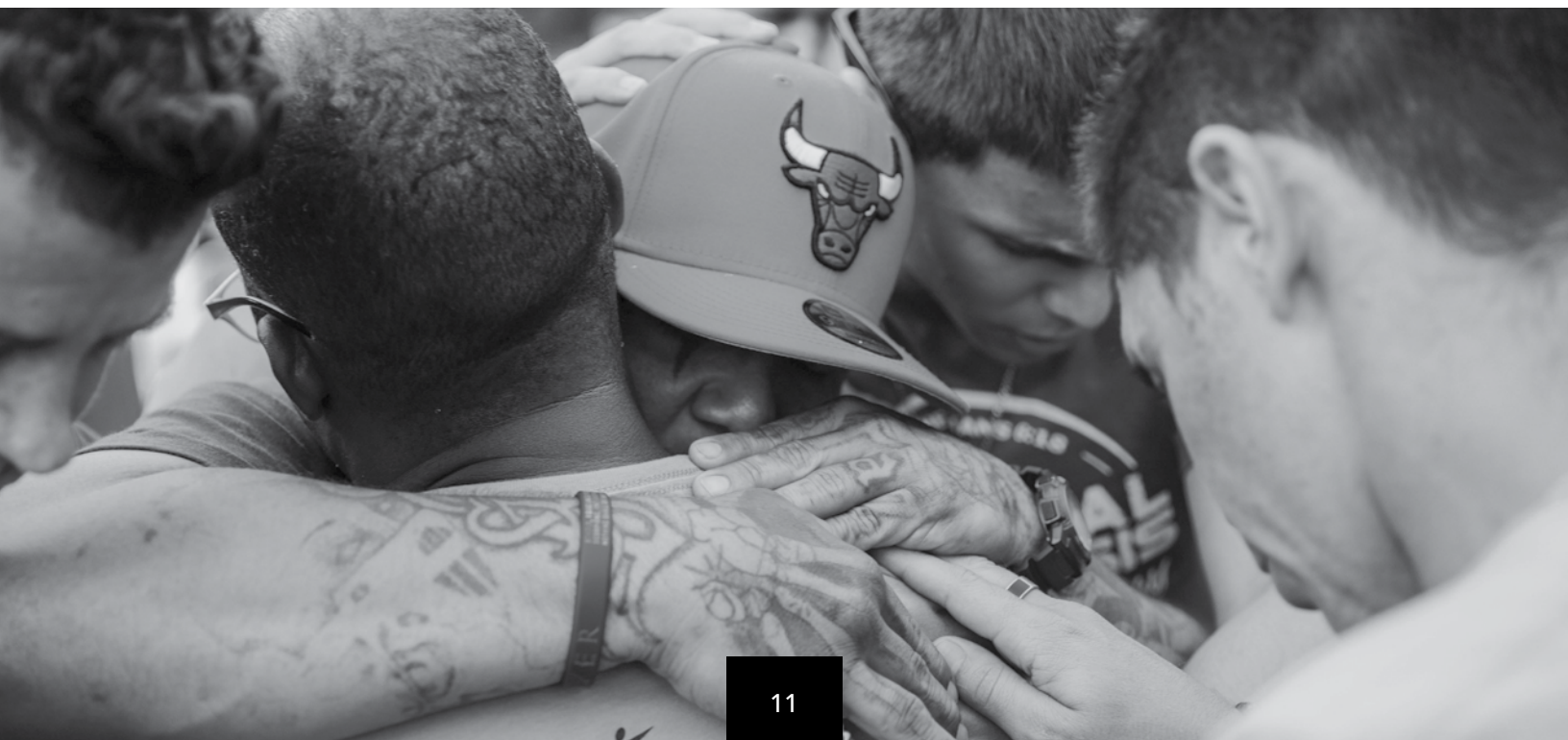
Here, we can see a vivid picture of the futility of human efforts to solve deep-seated, spiritual problems. The chains and irons represent society's attempts to control or "fix" this man's condition. These methods not only failed, but left him worse off — physically scarred and emotionally broken.

Many of us can relate to this man's experience. We may have tried various "solutions" to our problems. While these attempts are often made with good intentions, they often leave us feeling more hopeless and carrying the scars of repeated failures. It's important to recognize that true healing and transformation often require a power beyond human capability.

⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

This verse captures the depth of despair that often comes with terrible struggles. The man's continuous crying out and self-harm reflect a pain so intense that it seems endless — a never-ending year of a thousand nights.

Suppose you've been living in the grip of addiction or other life-controlling issues. In that case, this feeling of perpetual darkness is all too familiar. It can seem as though joy and relief are impossible and always out of reach.



⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷ He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” ⁸ For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”

⁹ Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” ¹⁰ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹² The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” ¹³ He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Never forget that Jesus has complete authority over every and any spiritual force you might face. The sheer number of demons (enough to drive 2,000 pigs to their death!) emphasizes the severity of the man’s condition and the magnitude of Christ’s power.

No matter how overwhelming or impossible our situation may seem, it is not beyond Jesus’ ability to transform. His power far exceeds the forces that bind us — whether they’re addictions, traumas, or deeply ingrained patterns of behavior. You can trust in Christ’s power, even when your battles seem unwinnable.

¹⁴ Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

This verse provides a striking before-and-after picture of transformation: The once-wild, naked, and tormented man is now calm, clothed, and in his right mind. This dramatic change shows us how Jesus’ transformative power affects the whole person: body, mind, and spirit.

This is also a powerful demonstration of God’s mercy. It’s not just about removing the negative influences but about restoring the person to wholeness and dignity. This kind of profound change is something only God can accomplish.

¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. ¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”



These verses highlight an essential aspect of transformation — the call to share our story. Jesus' instruction to the man emphasizes that personal transformation is not just for individual benefit, but also to impact others.

As Don Coley beautifully puts it, “When the man begged to follow Jesus, he was told ‘No. Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.’ The God who is powerful enough to calm the storm is also tender enough to remember a family at home that needs to know their loved one has been made well.” Our healing and transformation can be a powerful testimony to those who knew us before, especially our family and close community.

When we experience God's healing and mercy, we're called to be witnesses of His power to others.

“Every person that Jesus saves, He sends.”

—Dale Oquist

²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

By sharing his story, this man spreads the news of Jesus' power and mercy throughout the region.

“If a story isn't told, it's almost as if it didn't happen.”

—Nolan Crooks

This is the importance of testimony in the Christian life. Sharing our stories of transformation not only impacts others but also reinforces our own faith and helps us fully realize the change God has worked in us.

“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.”
Luke 8:39



Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions



- What brought you to New Life Community today? How do you hope to experience transformation in your life?
- What are ways that you can involve godly community and accountability in your life?
- Reflecting on the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5, can you relate to feeling bound by chains that seem impossible to break? How does Jesus' power in this story give you hope?
- As you begin this journey of transformation, what is one practical step you can take this week to "set your mind on things above" (Colossians 3:2) rather than on earthly struggles?



Verses to Reflect on From This Chapter:

- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)
- “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 (NIV)
- “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2 (NIV)
- “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)
- “I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.” 1 John 2:12 (NIV)
- “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2 (NIV)
- “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” Romans 8:15 (NIV)
- “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:1-3 (NIV)
- “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” 1 Peter 5:8-9 (NIV)
- “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” Luke 8:39 (NIV)



Everyone who belongs to Christ
will be given *new life*.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:22

