

## Week 7 Day 7 | *Freedom: From Our Old Identity*

Have you ever run into people after having not seen them in years? Perhaps you haven't seen them since high school or even childhood. You start talking and before long, you have one of two revelations.

The first is that they are exactly how you remember them. They have the same loud laugh, they're still a die hard sports fan, and they're still striving for the same empty pursuits. You're amazed at how, after all these years, they haven't changed a bit.

Or they are nothing like what you remember. The snotty cheerleader with a wild reputation authors a popular teen blog, teaching the values of purity and self-respect. Or the former bully is now a loving, stay-at-home dad of five who volunteers weekends with Habitat for Humanity. This time, you're amazed because after all those years, they aren't a bit the same.

Saul would fall into this second category. If you ran into him after his "road to Damascus" experience, you would have been in utter shock. The man you remembered was previously known for his mission to destroy the church. He approved of stoning Christians. He dragged men and women from their homes to throw them in jail. He threatened the lives of disciples, increasing persecution to the greatest degree. That's the Saul you remember, but he doesn't even go by that name anymore. It's Paul now.

Paul was now the prolific writer of roughly half of the 27 books of the New Testament. A captivating preacher, converting the lost, and building the church he formerly sought to tear down. A generous traveler, risking life and limb to spread the message of the love of Jesus. Possibly the most influential Christ-follower in the New Testament and arguably the most humble. Now after all these years . . . Paul wasn't a bit the same.

When we become Christ-followers, we are freed from who we were. We surrender our old lives and get new identities in exchange. Saul became Paul. Thus, Paul no longer lived in such a way that his old identity determined his new life.

Once Saul was converted, he didn't slip up and start persecuting Christians again. He didn't stop and say, "Well, because I've always been a persecutor, I guess I always will be." He was freed from that old identity and it was no longer his struggle.

Too often, we let our past become our identity. We let our struggles define us. When they define us, they control us. This constantly happens with our fitness: "I've quit every program I've started . . . what's one more?" "I guess I'll just be overweight all my life." "It's not like I'm on drugs . . . at least my fitness addiction is good for me." Because it's who we've been, we let our struggles decide who we'll continue to be.

Paul would have a lot to say about that. If there's one thing he persecuted after his conversion, it was the old identity. Three times in the New Testament, he does just that. He reminds us that our old self, our old identity, has no business in the life of a Christ-follower. We see it in Romans 6:6, as he colorfully portrays what happens to our former identity, saying, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

In Colossians 3:9–10, Paul portrays the old and new selves as if they're garments: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." Because of who God says you now are, you are freed from having to wear your old, sinful self any longer.

Then in Ephesians we see that, because of who God is in us, we are becoming like Him:

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*—4:22–24 (NIV)

Did you notice what preceded the "new self"? That we are made new in the "attitude of our minds." God didn't just repair an old broken mind. Our mindset, our thoughts, and our attitudes are new, fresh out of the box!

While it's hard to comprehend, understand this: our math is not God's math. We are not the sum of our past, present, and future. We don't deserve our future. Our ways are not His ways. Where we find defeat, He finds victory. Where we see waste, He sees purpose. Where we see the same old, God gives us the brand-new.

Don't resign yourself to your struggle! Who you were is not who you are. It's certainly not who you have to continue to be. God is in the freedom-giving business and He has freed you now and for all eternity.

### Prayer

*Father, thank You for not seeing me the way I oftentimes see myself. Will You forgive me when I let my struggles define me rather than Your love? Please continue to renew the attitude of my mind. Help me live out the new self, created to be like You. Amen.*

### Meditation

My mind is new because of You.

### Daily Spiritual Exercise

Psalms 136 is a wonderful chapter, perfect for your three to five minutes of adoration prayer. I want you to do something a little different as you go through it.

Each of the 26 verses ends with "His love endures forever." After you've read each verse, add to your prayer, "He has freed me from \_\_\_\_\_," filling in the blank with an attribute of your old self.

Then I want you to pause and give thanks for that miracle, reflecting on the amazing work God has done in your life.

Through this process, you will be reminded that because of who He is, who you were is not who you are. Therefore, you no longer live like you once did. You now live truly free.