

"New"  
"New in Christ"  
Pastor Craig Groeschel

Introduction Video:

"My life was so meaningless. I searched for anything that would give me purpose. Drinking made me feel better; that only led me to more bad decisions and it cost me more than I ever imagined."

"But someone saw more in me than I did. My friend took me to church one day and it changed me. I'm permanently marked. I am now changed forever. Christ made me new."

PASTOR CRAIG GROESCHEL: Hey, welcome today to all of our LIFE churches, and all of our network churches and those of you joining us from all over the world at church online.

We're starting a brand new three-week series called "New." Today, I'd like to ask all of you at all of our different churches, "How many of you, at some point in your life or another, you've been dissatisfied with your behavior?" You don't like the way you acted, you're occasionally dissatisfied with yourself. Raise your hands. Hands going up at all of our different churches.

I don't know about you, maybe you find yourself yelling at your kids sometimes when you shouldn't do that. You find yourself being impatient with the people that you love. Maybe you can be a bit overly critical.

But yet, you look at your life and you say, "Hey, I'm trying to be a follower of Christ and be a faithful Christian, but sometimes I do things that are not very Christ-like."

For example, at my house just a couple of days ago, two of my kids got into a spat. Everybody say "spat." That ever happen at your house? Your kids get into a spat? It happened at our house. One kid raised her voice at the other; the other raised her voice back. Another kid jumped in to defend the first one. Another jumped in to defend the second one. There's four kids raising their voices, and the man of the household jumped in and screamed, "Don't raise your voices. All of you, quiet down right now because we don't yell in this household." Can any of you ever relate to that?

What happened? I'm doing the very same thing I'm telling them not to do. And I look at my life and say, "Why am I like that?" And so often, we are very dissatisfied and even discouraged by the way we behave. And so, we say, "Well, I need to try harder. I need to be better." And it's kind of neat that sometimes people say, "Well, maybe I need go to

church. Maybe I need to turn over a new leaf." Sometimes people say, "Well, I'll try to be religious."

Well, kind of a key thought today is this:

"Religious behavior may make you nice but only Christ can make you new." I want to say it again: "You can go to church and you can try hard. Religious behavior, trying hard, that may make you nice, but only Christ can make you new."

In fact, when we follow Christ truly, we're not just better, but he makes us new. In fact, I want to dive into our key verse for this series and we'll look at this verse each week of the three-week series. Second Corinthians 5:16 and 17, Paul said, "At one time, we thought of Christ merely from a," what? All of our different churches, let's say it aloud. "We thought of Christ merely from a human point of view."

Quite honestly, that's where some you might be right now.

You look at Jesus and say, "From a human point of view, he was probably a good teacher." "He was a great, moral leader." "He was obviously a nice guy." "He said some pretty cool things." You look at him, from a human point of view, which is still limited.

Paul goes on to say, "How differently we know him now." Not just know about him, but "how differently we know

him." Verse 17, he says, "this means that anyone who", what? Let's say it aloud, all of our churches. "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ", what have they become? They become a new person. The old has gone and what has begun? Everybody say it aloud. "A new life has become."

Notice it doesn't just say, "Hey, anyone who believes in Christ," because even the demons believe in Christ, and yet shudder. But anyone who belongs to him, anyone who is fully surrendered to him, isn't just better but is new. The old has gone and behold, everything has become new.

In fact, one weekend between services, after I preached one message, I was out just talking to people in the lobby and this gal came up to me and she said, "Oh, my gosh, you cannot be the Craig Groeschel I went to college with. There's no way you're that same guy. He was wild. Here you -- there's no way you're that same guy." So, I decided to mess with her.

I said, "You know what? I'm not. I'm not that guy."

"But you look like him."

I said, "No, no, I'm not like him at all. That guy is long gone. You're talking to a new person." And in God's eyes, that is absolutely and completely 100 percent true, not

just better by trying harder but new by the power of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, let me tell you what we're going to do in the upcoming weeks. This week and the next week, I'm going to let you hear from some of the different campus pastors from all of our different LIFE churches. If you're new with us, we have 15 different LIFE churches, and I want you to hear from the pastors who pastor the different churches. We'll also hear from a network pastor; I'll tell you what that is. And some of our different leaders.

In week three, we're going to raise the question, "What happens when you know you're new in Christ but you don't feel new in Christ.

Today, I want you to hear from some of our pastors. The first story I want to tell you about how God makes us new is from Pastor Chuck Denny from LIFE church in Hendersonville, Tennessee. And this story is called "Everyone is welcome."

PASTOR CHUCK DENNY: Thanks Pastor Craig. Well, I'm Chuck, the pastor of the LIFE church, Hendersonville, Tennessee location. I want to tell you a story that started on July 4th of 2010 when Mike and Maryann Lovely [phonetic] and their daughter, Michelle, walked through the doors of our

church for the first time. They quickly found me and asked if it was going to be a problem or if their daughter would be welcomed into our church.

You see, their daughter was seven months pregnant and was not married. And I quickly assured them that everyone is welcome at LIFE church. They didn't really know how to take that but they came anyway. And a few weeks into their story, Michelle raised her hand to give her life to Christ right here at this church.

You fast forward a few weeks and Michelle began to get really connected here at the church. Everyone reached out and loved her as one of our own. A couple of months after that, Michelle gave birth to her son, Ian. And Ian was a crowd favorite here at the church, big old blond hair and everybody loved Ian.

The part I love about this story is Michelle was baptized here a few months after giving her life to Christ here at LIFE church. And a few months after that, she met her husband-to-be, a great young man that's in the military, and I was privileged enough to marry them here at LIFE church. And that brought about some sad news that we were going to have to say goodbye to Michelle and Ian as they embarked on their new journey out to a military base out in Colorado.

But the story doesn't stop there; you see, it just

gets better. What God had begun in Michelle here at LIFE church continues today. Even just to a few weeks ago, her story continues here in our church. You see, Michelle got so excited about what God had called her to do that she began to use the Internet and leverage the technology available through our resources online, that she led her friends through their very own Chazown experience.

Then after that, she was able to use church online as a platform and a tool to invite her friends to come to our church here in Hendersonville, Tennessee. They walked through the doors for the first time ever; they gave their life to Christ. And now they have signed up to serve in our LIFE Kids ministry. Just for the last two weeks, they have both been here serving faithfully.

And the best part is Michelle has now accepted a youth position on the Air force base where she's ministering to students each and every week.

The deal is, everyone is welcome at our church and everyone has a story that God wants to use.

PASTOR CRAIG GROESCHEL: I love this story. You've got a young lady who's not even sure if she's going to be welcome. But you all in Tennessee, you may be the most friendly church around. You welcome everybody; you throw your

arms wide open and help them feel loved, and this girl's life is totally committed. And now she's serving God, ministering to kids, which is truly truly phenomenal.

In fact, Jesus was very passionate about this kind of welcoming attitude. In fact, he said in Luke 14 -- it's very interesting -- he told the listeners, he said, "Hey, when you're throwing a banquet or a party, don't just invite the rich people, and don't just invite the popular people and your friends and your relatives and those who can pay you back. But he says in verse 13, "But when you give a banquet," who should you invite? He says, "You should invite the poor and the crippled and the lame, and the blind. And when you do that," what will you be? He said, "You will be blessed."

What I love about Jesus is he often invited those that others overlooked. He invited those that the religious people would look down on, and he would say, "It doesn't matter where you've come from or what you look like. Everyone is welcome." And I want you to know at all of our different churches, everyone is absolutely and completely welcome.

You come in with your doubts and your questions. You come in with your fears and your insecurities. You come in with all of the darkness that we all can fall into, and your sins and your struggles; you come in.

It doesn't matter the color of your skin. It



doesn't matter if you've got a lot of money or no money at all. It doesn't matter if you've got a lot of hair or no hair or purple hair, or pierces here or pierces here or pierces here, and that's all I'm going to say. If you've got pierces anywhere, you come in.

I don't care if you've got nice clothes or not nice clothes as long as you wear clothes. Because at LIFE church, we have a dress code. It's very simple: It is "Please do." You just come on in as you are.

And the great news is, although God accepts you as you are, he will never leave you as you are. With Christ, he makes all things new. I love being a part of church where everyone is welcome.

In fact, I want to share with you another story. This one is from LIFE church, Fort Worth, Texas. Pastor Robert Wall will tell you about the story. I call it "a New Marriage."

PASTOR ROBERT WALL: Thanks, Craig. Hi, everyone. I'm Robert Wall, pastor of LIFE church here in Fort Worth, Texas. And I'm standing here with Bruce and Tracy and they have an incredible family. And I'll never forget the first weekend that they came. Their son, Bruce Jr, commits his life to Christ. And then our next baptism bash, their daughter,

Arianna [phonetic], and Tracy and Tracy's sister were all baptized.

And God was doing great things. But unfortunately along the way, Bruce and Tracy began to have marriage problems, and unfortunately, felt that their only solution was to get a divorce so they divorced.

But after that, they continued to attend each and every week separately. And God began to do work in their life individually. And Craig, it was in the series, "From This Day Forward" that God did something powerful in their lives and I want everyone to hear their story.

BRUCE: "Well, "From This Day Forward" made a huge impact on our relationship and our lives. And it was through every message in that series God began to do something powerful in and through us from "Fighting Fair" to "Having Fun", "Staying Pure", "Never Giving Up."

But I'll never forget the first week, that "Seeking God." I just began to think back how we sought God separately, and we began to learn that we would have to seek God together to have a successful marriage, and our lives were changed at that point.

TRACY: The enemy is put in place to destroy, and he thought that he had us, but we won. And we won the battle and we were made new.

PASTOR ROBERT WALL: Oh, that is so good. And you know what guys, we are so excited and looking forward to celebrating the big day coming up when the two of you are getting remarried. God is so good.

Craig, back to you.

PASTOR CRAIG GROESCHEL: We celebrate with you guys, Bruce and Tracy. We love you and we're so thankful that God has brought your marriage back together. In fact, you will be remarried and we praise God for that.

In fact, some of you are right now, you may hit a place in your life where you're kind of like they were. You feel like you're hitting a dead end and you see no way to get through what you're going through. I hope Isaiah 43, verse 19 will speak to you. And this is what God says. God says, "See, I'm doing a", what? Let's all say it aloud. "I'm doing a new thing." God says, "Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it?" "I'm making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Some of you, you need a new thing right now in your faith, or you need a new thing in a relationship, or you need God's new thing in your finances, or you need new healing in your body. And I just believe that we serve a God that when everyone else says, "There is no way," our God can make a way.

"See, I'm doing a new thing." When no one else sees, our God sees it.

It's a little bit like "Blues Clues," if any of you guys have little kids and you've been cursed with "Blues Clues."

"You just got a letter." I'm sorry. Forget I ever said that. Just edit that out. You're like, "What is he doing?"

"I wonder who it's from." Thank you, both of you. So, anyway, in that little show, the characters, sometimes they can just -- I can't believe I know this but I do -- they can jump into a picture on the wall and disappear like, "Here we go." And they jump into the picture and they're gone.

Or I love the cartoons when the cartoon character's in trouble and they take out chalk and they're like, "We can't get away." And so, what does he do? He draws a door and then goes through the door. Okay?

I don't know if God is like that or not, but it's the best I could come up with because sometimes you don't see a door, but we serve a God who can make a door. We serve a God who can make a way when there is no other way. And he is taking lives like Bruce and Tracy, when their marriage falls apart, and he is miraculously bringing it back together when they did not see a way.

And that's why we'll never stop doing what we're doing at our church. In fact, we love to say that "we are faith filled, big thinking, "bet the farm," risk takers, that we will never insult God with small thinking or safe living." We love to say, "We're going to think big and we're going to think bigger because people matter to God."

I had one guy tell me one time, he said, "Well, I like your church but I'm not going to come there because it's too big." And I'm just like, "Are you serious? It's too big?" I'm telling you, "I love all sized churches." Okay? Small, medium, large. Someone say, "Size doesn't matter. Size doesn't matter."

In the church world, I'm telling you, "God loves all size churches. They're all important and all effective." But man, I hope those of you who are maybe part of a small church, man, start them small, baby. But grow them, reach people.

In order to keep a church small, what that means is you cannot reach people to keep it small. And God called us to expand the kingdom, to continue to grow, to reach out. And I would just say this. "Man, as long as there's one person in our community that does not know Christ, this place is not too big." We will do everything possible to continue to help everyone feel welcome and meet the God who makes all things

new. [applause] In fact -- thank you -- celebrate it big.

In fact, we're trying to think big and we are going to be launching some new locations. In fact, I wanted you to hear from Pastor Sam Roberts, and I call this story, "New Locations"

PASTOR SAM ROBERTS: Hey, thanks, Craig. Man, I'm excited. I'm right out in front of our new location here that's going to be opening soon in Jenks, Oklahoma, in the Tulsa area.

Let me tell you something. This is a new tool that God has given us to see many people become a new creation in Christ Jesus and we are excited about that.

And this isn't all. Let me tell you what else God's got coming. Because of your generosity to "spaces and places," we're going to be opening locations this year in Moore, Oklahoma in the Oklahoma City area. And then also in Keller, Texas, there in Dallas/Fort Worth. We're excited about all the new work God is doing there.

But let me tell you something, above and beyond that, man, there's three that we were negotiating on right now as we are speaking. Man, I can't even tell you about that; it's unbelievable what God is doing as we see many, many people become a new creation in Jesus Christ. It's why we exist, to see people become fully devoted followers of Christ.

And man, Craig, God is good all the time.

PASTOR CRAIG GROESCHEL: And thank you to all of you who give faithfully to help us start these new campuses. It's blow-away amazing what God is doing.

Sometimes, other pastors will say, "Craig, why is LIFE church growing? Why are you reaching new people?" And the answer I always tell them -- and this is the sincere truth -- it's because you care so much about other people. It's because you're praying; it's because you're inviting. It's because you are doing anything and everything you can to share the love that God has given you with people all over. And you're some of the most crazy, aggressive faith-filled, inviting people that I've ever seen.

The reason this place is growing is because you are reaching out and you're inviting your friends and you're seeing God do tremendous things as you do so.

In fact, this next story -- I'm going to take you to South Tulsa, Oklahoma, Pastor Tome Dawson. And I call this story, "The Power of An Invitation."

PASTOR TOME DAWSON: Thanks so much, Pastor Craig. It is such an honor to be a part of all that God is doing. And to signify that, the story I have to share really just tells the chain reaction of life change that happens when

folks simply invite others to church.

I want to share a story about the Abbot family. They've got a six-year-old little girl named Emma May Grace who got baptized at one of our baptism bashes. And the amazing thing is, she invited over 50 people to come watch her publicly proclaim what God has done in her life. And the amazing thing is, over 40 of those folks showed up.

Of those 40, there was a couple that had been disengaged from church for a long time but decided to come, loved it so much that they became regular attenders. They liked it so much, they invited their parents to come and their parents also had become disenchanted with church. But because they were familiar with your books, Pastor Craig, they decided to come. They fell in love with it as well and started coming consistently.

These parents then invited their other daughter to attend so she came with her son. When they showed up, their lives were changed and they were part of the next baptism bash, inviting their circle of friends. And that chain reaction of life change continued all because this little girl invited folks to church.

Interesting thing about this weekend is Emma Grace got baptized on a Saturday night. And for the campuses that have Saturday night services, you need to know that is the



best time to come to church.

Well, she invited two pastors who were able to come on Saturday. And while they were at that service, they heard about the resources that we are able to give away absolutely free because of all of us and all of you that give so generously to God through our local church. And now these pastors are taking these resources, and it's impacting entire churches all because this little girl decided to invite.

And the best way for me to sum this up is the end of the email that Aaron, the dad, sent to me. And here's what he said:

"There really is no way to know how many lives have been or will be affected because a six-year-old was obedient and shared openly about her faith. The only thing I am sure of is how it changed the faith and commitments of her dad. I see the power of something as simple as asking someone to church and how much of an impact that can make in the lives of so many."

Thanks so much again for the opportunity. That's one of many stories that God is playing out right here at South Tulsa.

PASTOR CRAIG GROESCHEL: Thank you, Pastor Tome. I want you all to think about that for a moment. A six-year-old

girl gets 40 people to come to church. What's your excuse? All right? I mean, think about it. Imagine how God could use all of us if we get the faith like this little six-year-old girl that says, "Hey, we want to get people to come and see what God is doing."

In fact, I love the way this story unfolds in John chapter 1, verses 45 and 46. I'll read it to you and then show you the part I love. Phillip found Nathaniel and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." In other words, for decades, we've been looking for this one and we believe we've actually found him. And the other guy said, "Nazareth? Nazareth? Nazareth? That hole in the wall place? Can anything good come from there," Nathaniel asked.

Phillip simply responded -- and I love this -- he said, "hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, come and see. Just come check it out. Hey, just come on over here and take a look for yourself." And that's what I love about you all when you invite people. It's like, "Hey, come and see. Come and see. Come and see what my God is doing in this place."

"Well, I don't want to go to that stupid video church."

"Hey, come and see."

"I'm not going to go to that place. I hear they" --

"Come and see. You just come check it out."

If you would have brought someone last week, they would have seen lots and lots of people publicly confess their lives, giving them to Christ. In fact, it blows me away, but last week, total, at all of our different churches, over 1,400 people publicly lifted their hands to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may not understand it and you may not quite like it, but you've got to acknowledge, "Something is going on. Something is going on." Come and see the God who makes all things new. Come and see the God who makes all things new.

In fact, this last story for this week's message comes from Midwest City, Oklahoma. Pastor Sam Marin, very specifically about someone's life who was changed. I call this story, "Born Again."

PASTOR SAM: Thanks, Craig. This story is a story of one of the families on our campus. And Christina -- she's the wife. She came to the church one day. Man, she was in a desperate place and she came in and sat down with myself and one of our staff members and just poured her heart out.

She was in a dark place with her husband. Her husband is in the military and he was suffering from some

post-traumatic stress, and this was really affecting their marriage and just their family as a whole. And she didn't know where else to go, but she saw the church and she said, "I've got to go there and talk to pastor," and she did that. And we were able to pray with her and just encourage her. And really, what we did is we just told her, "You just got to start coming to church and bring your family here."

And she did just that. Every Sunday she would come to church and bring her family and they started coming together. And little by little, we started seeing something happen inside of them. Their face was changing, their countenance was changing. God was doing something and they got into a LIFE group and started getting plugged into the church.

And one Sunday night, she emailed me and I'd like to read this e-mail to you.

It says, "Hello, Pastor Sam. This is Christina. I wanted to thank you again for all your words you tell everyone at church. We're so blessed to be a part of LIFE church. My husband, since the day I went there, the day that I talked to you and I did not know what to do. Remember that day? It's been a miracle for us. Michael is another person. He is so thankful that I am by his side as his wife and thankful that I asked for help.

Now since we met God, our life is better. It's beautiful, happier. There's no more, "I want a divorce." No more fights, no more hate. He likes to go to church every Sunday. He likes to go because he feels peace, love, security.

Since then, he hasn't had those bad thoughts that he wanted to kill himself again. God has answered our prayers and I just can't find the right words to express how thankful, how happy I am because we trusted God and he was there all the time.

And we're still asking for favors. He has showed that with him, we can do everything. Our faith is so big like his furious love for us.

I'm working from home now and I'm starting to give my 10 percent back to him. I can't believe how nice God is. I don't know how I can write my story and you can share with more people because God is real, and he helped us with a very difficult time.

And since we gave our life to him, I feel that we are new people, a new us. It feels like we are born again. Thank you for everything, Pastor Sam. I hope you and your family are doing well.

And that's just a great story of what God can do

with a family, a couple, a marriage when they give their lives over to him. Thanks.

PASTOR CRAIG GROESCHEL: I love what she said in that e-mail, "I can't believe how nice God is. And we feel like we're new people. We feel like we're born again."

That's a biblical phrase that we see in a story about a Pharisee named Nicodemus who was from the best behaved group of people, a group that followed 613 commandments. And he went under the cover of night to see Jesus. That's where we get the phrase, "Nick at Night." And so, anyway -- so, he went to see Jesus and he said -- sorry -- he said, "We know you've got to be from God; you have to be."

Jesus replied in John 3:3, "Very truly, I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God unless," they are what? He said, "Unless they are born again."

Nicodemus asked back, he said, "How can someone be born when they're old? Surely, they can't enter a second time in their mother's womb to be born." Jesus, in verse 5, answered, "Very truly, I tell you no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water," that's baptism, and spirit, that's the spiritual new birth. "Flesh gives birth to flesh." In other words, that's what we do, you know, we get married and "boom," we have kids. "Flesh gives birth to flesh but spirit gives birth to spirit."

You can be born physically. You can also be born anew spiritually, from God. He goes on to say in verse 7, "You should not be surprised at my saying," you must be what? "You must be born again."

What I love about God is he's not trying to give us a better life or trying to help us improve on our lives, but he truly gives us a new life. God is not asking you to turn over a new leaf, but through Christ, to experience a new life.

It's not by your power or by your strength or by your own religious effort. Religious behavior can make you nice but Christ can make you new.

All of our churches, let's pray together. "Father, we ask that in your presence that your spirit would do a renewing work in our hearts."

As you pray today at all of our different churches, I know a lot of you right now, you're facing some significant trials, maybe like Bruce and Tracy or others, that you're facing something and you say, "Really, I need my faith renewed." "I need my strength renewed." "I need my hope renewed."

I believe that when we don't see a way that God can make a way. At all of our different churches, those of you who would say, "I really do. I need God's power and his

presence. I need him to do what I can't do myself. I need his renewing goodness in my life right now, a touch from him."

Would you just lift up your hands right now just in a moment of honesty and say, "Yes, that's me." Just lift them up, all of our different churches. Hands going up all over the place.

"God, I pray that your spirit would do a healing and a renewing work. God, where we've lost faith and maybe looking at the circumstances instead of looking at you, renew our faith, oh, God."

"God, where we're losing hope, God, I pray you will renew our hope. God, in those relationships that are hurting or damaged or destroyed, God, I pray you would do a work beyond what we see. Even though the world would say it's destroyed, God, we believe you can make all things new."

"God, I pray especially today for those who need your presence, need your comfort, need your goodness. God, we thank you that you are here. And God, you are the one who makes all things new."

As you keep praying today at all of our different churches, I love the story of Nicodemus. Because, what you've got is a very moral guy who's coming to Jesus and saying, "Hey, tell me the rules. What do I need to know?" And this was a guy that was doing everything right. He had a lot of



good religious behavior.

But Jesus said the same thing to him that he would say to all of us. He said, "Hey, to be a part of the kingdom of God, to be a part of my family, you're not going to be able to work your way there. What you need is, you need a new birth. You need to be spiritually born again."

You can be born one time; you're born physically. If you're born one time, you actually die twice. You'll die a physical death, and then ultimately, you'll die a spiritual death.

The good news is though, you can be born twice. When you're born twice, you're born a physical birth, and then you're spiritually born anew. Then, you only die one time; you die a physical death but spiritually, because you've been forgiven and made new by Christ, you will live forever with God in heaven.

All of our different churches, there are those of you who are here, you recognize, "Man, I'm often disappointed in my behavior. I know I act in ways that are not right and displeasing to God."

And the reality is, all of us do because we are bent towards sin. And it's not of a laughing matter; it's very serious. Our sin separates us from God.

And I believe with all my heart that that's why many of you are here. Just like in the story that Pastor Sam talked about. You're going to discover that God is very nice; he is full of grace. He is full of compassion.

His compassions, they're new every morning. And you're about to, not just become better, but because of Christ, the sinless son of God, who died and rose again, you're going to become new.

All of our different churches, those of you who would say, "I recognize I do need his life. I recognize I am a sinner. I want to be born anew, spiritually forgiven, transformed and made new by Christ. Today, by faith, I give my life to him."

That's your prayer, would you lift your hands high right now, just all over the place, and say, "Yes, that's my prayer."

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