

[official study guide]

recreated

**how Jesus transforms
our story**

shane callicutt

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Before We Get Started...

Thank you for picking up the Recreated Study Guide. *Recreated: How Jesus Transforms Our Story*, was released in May of 2016, and almost immediately I was asked if there was an accompanying study guide. To be honest, that thought hadn't even crossed my mind. It was my first book and my mind was no where near the thought of companion materials for the book.

Seven months later, here we are. Consequently, this is also my first full blown study guide. For your benefit, this study guide has been field tested at New Harmony Church in Salem, Missouri, the church where I serve as Worship Pastor. Having fully taught through the study guide with our people, I believe what you hold in your hand is a seven-week study that will be suitable for small or large groups.

The beauty of this study guide is that you don't have to read Recreated to benefit from the study. Every church, every small group has those individuals who simply aren't readers, so I designed the study to serve as a stand-alone study. However, it goes without saying that reading Recreated will enrich the study. If you plan to lead this study, I urge you to also read the book.

Please, enjoy the study.

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Study Guide

Adoption is not the norm. Most children stay with their birth parents so the odds are that you can't directly relate to the effects that adoption can have on a child. But I've noticed that adoption is on the rise. Even parents who are able to have their own children are adopting children. There has been a rise in celebrities who go overseas to adopt impoverished kids. There's been an increase in regular folks who do the same or adopt through fostering. Because of the celebrity dynamic, adoption has almost become a social status: if you adopt you're celebrated as compassionate.

But the truth is it's not all that glamorous. You've brought a child into your family who isn't a natural fit. They haven't inherited anything from either parent. Their disposition and personality don't come from yours. They don't look like you. And even though you have great power to mold them, at some level they will always retain characteristics of their biological parents. The kids grow up with a natural curiosity about where they came from that their adoptive parents cannot answer. This can be incredibly frustrating for both the parents and the children. Why did this have to be this way? Why did my birth parents give me up? Many questions arise.

1. Have you ever looked back on your life and asked God why there wasn't a better way?

“In short, if God works it out a certain way, then it is the best way, no matter how we feel about it.” p. 10

We all have different experiences from our pasts. Most of us wish we could have several redo's. The idea that it all happened with the full knowledge and permission of God so that in his divine wisdom we would be exactly where he wants us in this moment is hard to swallow. The sovereignty of God is hard to accept when life has been a wreck.

Chapter One: Adopted

“For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’” (Isaiah 46:9-10 ESV)

2. Can you trust God, who knows the end from the beginning? “I will accomplish all my purpose.” How do you reconcile your life – mistakes and all – with this declaration from God?

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways . . . Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:1-3, 16 ESV)

Our God knows us more intimately than we even know ourselves. We think we know ourselves better than anyone else, and that’s true until you consider how well God knows you. He knows every day of your life even before they ever happened. Everything.

Every. Thing. He knows it all.

3. As a believer, can you accept that even your worst decision, your worst fumble, your most devastating mistake has a redemptive purpose in God’s plan for your life?

“God has redemptive purposes in everything he does, for everyone affected by his actions.” p. 11

Chapter One: Adopted

New Name, Heir of Everything

When I was adopted, I received a new name. My last name went from Kyle to Callicutt. And when my last name became Callicutt, whatever Herman Callicutt had, I now had. And when he passed away, those things actually became mine, and they now belong implicitly to my children. When we are born again, we too receive a new name. We go from enemy to son.

The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.
(Isaiah 62:2 ESV, emphasis added)

Then there's the whole issue of the inheritance that comes with the new name. As adopted sons, we will inherit everything that the natural son will inherit. We become co-heirs with Christ, so whatever he has in the Father, we will have as well. Every square inch of the entire universe belongs to Christ; every galaxy and every atom belongs to him! To think about the idea that one day, his Church, his Bride will be co-owners of it all as well is simply staggering! But more than that, we will partake in the perfect harmonious fellowship that the Trinity has enjoyed for eternity past, and that will satisfy us through the endless ages!

5. How does being a co-heir of all things change your perspective on the troubles of this world?

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

God Becomes Liable for My Future Debts

In Roman adoption, the father of the family was held responsible for the actions of the children. The children held their share of responsibility as well, but the debt ultimately fell back upon the father. This one goes way back to when God made his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15). Abraham took the sacrifice, cut up and arranged the pieces, and intended to walk through those pieces as a symbol saying if I fail in this covenant, may I become like this animal. In-

stead, what happened is in the middle of the night Abraham witnessed God walking through the pieces in essence saying if I fail in this covenant, may I become like this animal. God made a covenant with Abraham to give him and inheritance and to suffer the consequences himself if Abraham broke his end of the covenant!

And we know that’s what ultimately happened. God covenanted with broken humanity and promised to absorb the consequences when we broke that covenant. In that moment, he took responsibility for Abraham’s (and our) future sins. He made himself liable for our future trespasses. And Jesus took the consequences of the broken covenant upon himself on the cross. When I trusted Christ, the cross not only wiped out my past sins, but it assumed responsibility for my future sins as well. Christ, who was sinless, took on 100% of the sins of those who would trust him for salvation so that we could become adopted sons, and co-heirs!

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

6. You *are* the righteousness of God, in Christ. How should that truth help you wage war on the sin in your life?

The Son’s New Obligations

The Romans obliged the adopted sons to bring honor and respect to their new father. When we talk about our adoption into God’s family, using the word obligation can seem a little cold. When we talk about obligations, we are usually thinking of a repayment of kindness, or a duty that we perform out of expectation. But we can never repay, and it can never be viewed as a duty. However, God actually does paint a picture for us in Scripture of the man or woman who has been born again and adopted as a son into his family. By this picture, we can know that we’re being transformed as these qualities increase in our lives.

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Study Guide

If you know me today, you wouldn't think that bullying was something I endured as a youth. I've been told by several people over the years that I look intimidating, simply by virtue of my size. And nearly just as many people who know me, but didn't grow up with me, have expressed surprise at learning this about my past. But it's true. I was desperate for acceptance, and for whatever reason that made me easy to push around.

I know not everyone was bullied as a kid. Talk about bullying doesn't resonate with everyone, but everyone wrestles with acceptance, some more than others. In my case, though adoption had a profoundly good effect upon my life, it also left an impact crater in my life. For a child who neither had the full story nor the emotional intelligence to grasp the complicated reasons behind what transpired in the adoption, a sense of abandonment settled into the recesses of my heart. And because it happened at such an early age, I scarcely knew any other way; it felt normal. This led to being bullied. Because I was so eager to be accepted, it was easy to take advantage of me and bully me.

1. Every person has a need to be accepted. In your past, how did your desire for acceptance bring about negative consequences?

I love the story of Joseph. I guess relate to him. He was bullied by his brothers. He was Israel's favorite son and he received gifts from his father that none of his other brothers ever received. By the time Joseph was seventeen, his brothers could scarcely speak a peaceful word to him.

But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. (Genesis 37:4)

Chapter Two: Bullied

When I read Joseph's story, I sense the same need for acceptance in him that I had. He desperately wanted the acceptance of his brothers. In Genesis 37:5-11, Joseph begins to share his dreams with the rest of the family. His dreams were lofty, and perhaps unknown to him at the time, prophetic. Something good was given to him. Something important was being said through his dreams. He shared those dreams with the hopes that his brothers would finally see that he didn't deserve the ridicule, which they so faithfully gave him on a daily basis.

It didn't work.

They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." (Genesis 37:19-20 ESV)

Thankfully, Joseph's brother, Reuben, had a "better" idea which kept them from killing him, but instead sold him into slavery. I don't know if this is absolutely true, but I tend to believe that while Joseph was in that pit, he had a moment where it became clear to him that his brothers were never going to accept him.

2. Have you ever had a moment of clarity where you knew that you were probably never going to be accepted by your peers?

"Somewhere between the pit his brothers threw him in and Potiphar's house, Joseph realized that God's acceptance was the only acceptance he needed to worry about." Page 34

I believe that in this moment of ultimate rejection from his brothers, Joseph began to realize that his only hope for acceptance was from God, not men. I wish I could say that what came out of me while I was being bullied was as noble as what we see come out of Joseph. Ten years of taunting, unkind jokes, and rejection had really

done a transformative work on me. But Jesus entered into my life when I was 15, and ever since he has been undoing the transformative work of bullies with his own transforming work.

3. Joseph had his moment in the pit where he realized that only God's acceptance mattered. Where was your pit experience? At what point did you realize that God's acceptance is enough?

We spend so much time trying to fit in. And let's be clear: we all need a place and a people who accept us. God designed us to desire community. But the need for acceptance is also deceptive. We may well be saved, but many Christians still wrestle with this issue. For me, acceptance had become an idol, and after I was saved, though I stopped trying for the acceptance of my schoolmates, I began looking for acceptance from my church-mates. I went from trying to be cool at school to trying to be cool at church.

*"God's acceptance is the thing that frees us from needing the approval of people."
Page 34*

4. Have you ever arrived at a place where no matter how much stuff you do in the Church you still feel empty?

I can't speak for everyone, but my experience was that as a young believer I had traded God's acceptance for Church acceptance and I didn't even know it. And just like in school, where I didn't stand up for myself, I became a yes man in the Church. I didn't know how to say no. There were times when things were done or said that I should've stood up and dissented, but I didn't.

It wasn't until I began digging into God that it began coming to light. I began reading the Bible, journaling, and reading time-tested Christian authors – all of which at the time were completely out of my comfort zone (I wasn't always a reader or a writer). I was trying to find acceptance among

Chapter Two: Bullied

Christians through using my gifts. Christians friends and spiritual gifts are both gifts from God, but I had allowed them to become the end-game instead of God himself.

*For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.
(2 Corinthians 1:20-22 ESV)*

5. What relationships, spiritual gifts, or talents have you allowed to be the barometer of your acceptance instead of resting in God's complete acceptance?

*"Adoption means acceptance. If God's promise includes my adoption when I trust Christ for salvation by faith alone, then full acceptance from God is part and parcel of the promise."
Page 36*

Too many Christians get caught up in the false gospel of working for God's approval. If God's acceptance of us relied upon our performance, our zeal, our results, then there would be no hope for us. None of us can fit in with God. He is holy, which literally means he is other than us. Even though we are made in his image, we are so mired in sin and corrupted by our

flesh that we, even on our best day, are in completely different universes.

The only way we gain entrance into God is because of Christ. The only way we fit in is if Christ in within. God makes me acceptable! And A sure sign that you are allowing the truth of God's complete acceptance is when difficult times come, you are not shaken or surprised that they've come. Look again at Joseph.

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Study Guide

If you've been reading Recreated as you work through this study guide, we've looked at salvation through the lens of adoption, and through the lens of acceptance. This chapter actually deals with my personal salvation experience. Every believer has a unique story to tell when it comes to the when, where, and how that Jesus saved them. But at the same time, every believer is saved by the same means: faith alone in Christ alone.

The thing about growing up in the church, especially in a place where church was so engrained in the prevailing culture, is that it becomes challenging to know the difference in being saved and being good. For me, I was a good kid. As I said in the book, I had three distinct salvation experiences, of which only the last one was the genuine article. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of false experiences is all too common in America's Bible Belt. I refer to it as Bible Belt Christianity in the book.

In a culture where the church has become a part of the cultural fabric, the line between believer and good person is really fuzzy to the casual observer. When the morality of the church is embraced as the societal ideal by the vast majority of people, across ethnicities, across the political spectrum, distinguishing the difference takes more than a glance.

1. **Can the morality of our culture and traditions confuse us on the matter of salvation?**

"When Church becomes so cultural, so institutional, salvation can be summed up in a list of behavior changes, rather than heart transformation."

Page 54

Chapter Three: Saved

One of the factors that weighed into my confusion as a child and young teen is that the approval of church folks was a kind of acceptance that I had been craving. If behavior change is how we gauge our acceptance before God, then we've fallen into a system of works based salvation. This is seductive because you can win the approval of other religious men and women quickly and mistake it for the approval of God.

The Apostle Paul maybe our best example of a man who was convinced that his works were saving him. Prior to meeting Jesus, of course. You can tell from his own testimony how convinced he was before Jesus.

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. (Acts 22:3 ESV)

Paul had done all he could to meet the expectations of the religious people in his life. He had ascended the Jewish social ladder in all matters of religious zeal, becoming a Pharisee.

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Philippians 3:5-6 ESV)

2. Paul's works were tied up in his acceptance with God. What happens to you when your acceptance with God depends on your works?

In Romans chapter seven Paul gives us a peek into what was going on in his heart before he met Jesus.

Chapter Three: Saved

As a Pharisee, Paul's understanding of salvation, that works secure your acceptance with God, drove him to ever increasing levels of zeal, activity, and indignation at other people's sin, so much so that it led him to murder.

Most of us (hopefully) have never actually murdered someone. But the pattern of failure and trying harder over and over again feels so familiar. Works will work you to death. Living in the church-saturated culture of northeast Mississippi came with a lot of unspoken expectations. But it doesn't have to be in the Bible Belt. In social media, there's a lot of Christian peer pressure that if you don't conform to certain ideologies and walk in locked step with the rest of us, you're probably not a real Christian.

4. In your spiritual walk have you ever confused morality with righteousness? What is the difference?

The danger implicit in modifying your behavior is that anyone can do it, lost or saved. Paul may have wrestled with coveting, but he was an upright man of impeccable morals before he met Christ. In fact, Paul was on his way to Damascus to try *harder* when he met Jesus.

"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'" (Acts 9:3-6 ESV)

Once Paul was born again, and he began to mature in his understanding of the Gospel, he went from works acceptance to the truth that our acceptance before God is completely by faith alone! Look at the difference Jesus made in this Pharisee's life! The man who lived by the law to the *nth* degree met Jesus and later penned these words:

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God

has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”
(Romans 3:20-24 ESV)

5. Evaluate your own salvation. What areas are still bound up in a works-based acceptance? What would those areas look like if you stopped basing your acceptance on your performance?

A large part of my personal testimony has to do with shaking off the parts of Bible Belt Christianity that had me performing for acceptance. In reality that’s a common struggle for every Christian. We’re wired to work, to perform. However, the reason the Gospel is good news, is because it’s good news! The good news is that our performance isn’t our ticket in! But instead it’s Christ’s performance that gets me in the door!

What we’ve learned about adoption is that God has adopted my past, present, and future. As my adopted Father, through Christ’s death on the cross, He has taken responsibility for everything I have done, am doing, and will do in the

“It’s important to get it in my heart that God has accepted me completely because of Jesus Christ, not because I’m performing well.” Page 59

future. When we are faced with this good news, performance can never be our ticket in. He saves us knowing we are sinners and that we will continue to sin. This is why Paul wrote in Romans:

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
(Romans 5:8 ESV)

Chapter Three: Saved

6. Has working for affection every really worked for anyone? What usually happens when you are constantly trying to work for someone's affection?

Do you still evaluate your acceptance with God by your works; by how well you perform? Living that way looks great on the outside, but inside you're dying, starving for spiritual nourishment, longing for the affection of your Father. Here's the secret. When you stop working for affection, and realize that God's affection for you isn't conditional on your works, you will experience the freedom that Jesus spoke of when he said his burden is easy and his yoke is light. Only then can our works for Jesus be a joy because it's done out of an abundance of love and gratitude. That's real transformation.

7. What practical steps can you start taking today to stop evaluating your acceptance by your works and instead rest in God's complete acceptance in Christ?

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Study Guide

In Recreated, this chapter had to be the one that followed my salvation story. Learning to forgive was one of the first things that God had to form in my heart. And it is such a powerful thing to learn. In fact, I would submit to you that above all other Christian qualities, forgiveness is foundational. If you are unforgiving, you may count yourself as unsaved because Jesus is clear that person who has been born again will be merciful and forgiving. With that said, it's important to remember that all believers undergo a transformation that moves us from someone who's unforgiving to someone who forgives freely and joyfully.

“Forgiveness is often the elephant in the room.” Page 64

1. Have you wrestled with how to forgive the people who have hurt you the deepest, or have you given your wounds a safe harbor?

One of the mistakes that we often make as zealous, freshly saved people is to blanket forgive everyone who has hurt us. Usually this comes from a pure desire to forgive, but it lacks understanding of how deep the wounds have cut. For me, being bullied carved a wide canyon into who I had become, but I had had erected barriers that would prevent me from tumbling into the crevasse. I did the blanket forgiveness thing at first, but I quickly realized that it was only surface deep. As Jesus gently began taking down my barriers, with each one removed there was a need for me to forgive again. And with each barrier removed, and fresh forgiveness offered, my character began to change.

“Forgiveness is much, much more a disposition of the heart than it is an action.” Page 66

2. How has God changed your character through teaching you how to be a forgiving person?

Chapter Four: Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been one of the most surprising things that God has done in my life. We tend to see forgiveness as something that will always be hard to do. May I suggest to you that forgiveness will only remain difficult as long as you remain stagnate in your spiritual growth? Your difficulty with forgiveness can be a reflection of how little you have grown spiritually. What God does in the heart of his children is he transforms us into people who love to forgive. Remember the father of the Prodigal Son?

In short, there's a father with a youngest son who demands his inheritance so that he can go live however he wants to live. The father gives him what he asks for, and lets him go. After the son has spent all his money and found himself homeless doing the most degrading work he could imagine, he decided to return to his father and offer to work as a slave as a way of repaying his debts. So the son returns home, and as he approaches their home, his father sees him coming. Here's where we'll pick up the story.

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

(Luke 15:22-24 ESV)

3. When's the last time you forgave someone as freely and joyfully as the Prodigal Son's father?

There are several things to note in the father's reaction to his son's return. First of all, there isn't a hint of anger or regret. He only expresses his love and affection for his son! If you read back a few verses, he didn't even give his son a chance to finish his speech. He embraced him, kissed him, then promptly interrupts him with what we read in Luke 15:22-24. He didn't do the passive aggressive reminder thing and say hey you spent all of the inheritance, you wasted it on hookers, gambling, and booze, and even though you don't deserve it, I forgive you. The son came to his father a broken man, and the father didn't even let him finish his apology; he embraced him and immediately cranked up the celebration!

This isn't how we usually forgive. There are at least three types of forgivers that totally miss the boat.

Passive-Aggressive Forgiver

You know this person. You ask for forgiveness, but before it's given, they have to make sure you know what you're apologizing for so they slip the dirty laundry list into their monologue. It's forgiveness with an added jab of guilt before they forgive you. That's not really forgiveness. If you feel the need to get your jab in before you forgive, you're actually only trying to make them feel bad enough to deserve your forgiveness. Forgiveness is never deserved.

4. Are you the passive-aggressive forgiver? Do you think people need to feel your pain before you can forgive them?

"If you're only forgiving people who deserve it, then it isn't really forgiveness." Page 73

Real forgiveness spares people pain. Real forgiveness doesn't need to qualify its deservedness. God forgives us when we have NO IDEA how deep and how wide our sin really is. He forgives us when we have only a surface understanding of how sinful we truly are. And His forgiveness is offered freely and completely in and through Jesus.

Passive Forgiver

You may also know this person. A passive forgiver simply doesn't deal with issues. You forgive and forget – which isn't Biblical. Real forgiveness pursues reconciliation. If you're going to forgive as God has forgiven you, it's not enough to forgive someone, then move on with life and not reconcile. God reconciles us when he forgives us. Passive forgivers offer forgiveness but don't bother to rebuild what was broken.

Reconciliation is essential to genuine forgiveness. It works to rebuild the relationship to a quality that was better than before. When God reconciles us, he doesn't just forgive our sins. Only forgiving our sins would set our balance at zero, but still wouldn't be enough to make things better than

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Chapter Four: Forgiveness

they were before. So God then gives us the righteousness of Christ and indwells us with the Holy Spirit. In doing that he seals us and guarantees that though we will sin again, our relationship will never be severed by sin again.

Likewise, in our forgiveness, we too must work to reconcile our relationships as God has with us, and make things better than they were before. If we only leave things as they were, whatever offense happened will only happen again. Passive forgiveness is self-serving because it spares you the stresses of actually dealing with conflict and facing your own failures.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
(Ephesians 4:32 ESV)

5. Are there people in your life whom you've forgiven, but never pursued reconciliation? What do you need to do to begin reconciling?

One caveat. Reconciliation is a two-way street. If you attempt reconciliation with someone, but they're not interested, Christ frees us to move on. Romans 12:18 tells us that as far as it depends upon us, we should live peaceably with everyone. But if you've done all you can to reconcile and there's no interest from the other party, God is gracious and you are free to get on with life.

Aggressive Forgiver

This might sound strange, but there are people out there who are very aggressive in how they pursue forgiveness with people. These people lack any sensitivity to allow God to work in the process, but are instead driven by a white-hot zeal to forgive quickly and not let the sun go down on their anger. Aggressive forgivers tend to see forgiveness as a religious work that they must do, so they push through because it gives them a sense of peace when they lay their heads down to sleep at night. This too is only self-serving because you're ultimately more concerned about your personal sense of peace and less concerned about the spiritual health of everyone involved.

6. Does going to bed with unresolved conflict make you anxious? Do you feel like forgiveness and reconciliation must be handled quickly in all situations?

None of these kinds of forgiveness spring from joy. Passive-aggressives forgive when they feel like it's deserved. Passives forgive but are too lazy to pursue reconciliation. Aggressives forgive for religious reasons so their sense of peace with God will be sustained. The Prodigal's father forgave purely out of the joy of his heart. He was happy to see his son, he wanted his son's pain to cease, he wanted his son to be reunited with the rest of the family, and out of that joy he forgave.

That kind of forgiveness is supernatural. We don't have it naturally. But thankfully when we are born again, we become supernatural people!

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Peter 1:3-4 ESV)

We are supernatural because of what we receive in our salvation! If we don't recognize ourselves as such, we will never be able to forgive supernaturally! Through the knowledge of him who called us we grow in our ability to live through the Divine nature. As we know him, know his Word, cultivate relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Divine nature will become increasingly our primary nature. Joy will become the well for our forgiveness, and we will delight in forgiving people, just as God delights in forgiving us.

7. What would it take for you to become a supernatural forgiver who delights in forgiving people?

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Study Guide

The journey of the saint is filled with conflict. Choices are made every day over whom you and I will please. Will you please yourself? Will you please others? Will you please God? People pleasing is a condition of the heart, and it's something we all wrestle with to varying degrees. We are confronted with it every time we face the choice of whether we will obey God or obey men. The label of people pleaser is reserved for those individuals whose need for approval leads them to ignore the command of God.

1. When we expend our energies on pleasing other people, how do we leave ourselves vulnerable?

Many times, when we pour ourselves out into others in the hopes of gaining their approval, we give them all the power and influence in the relationship. If approval isn't offered, it can be devastating. But as much as people pleasing appears to be kind of self-sacrificing and putting others before yourself (and God), there's more to it than meets the eye.

People pleasing is all about you. You want the affection of someone or a group of people, so you do whatever you need to do to gain that affection. Their happiness is just a means to an end so you can get your own happiness. But when your happiness hangs on the happiness of others around you, you'll find yourself chasing your proverbial tail.

The surprising truth about people pleasing is that under the surface it has nothing to do with making other people happy. . . It's a self-serving method of trying to gain affection." Page 82

My people pleasing was an effect of being rejected so much as a younger child. After I was born again, the church embraced me. That affection became an idol in my life and my people pleasing only shifted to a different group of people.

And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven.

(1 Samuel 13:5 ESV)

3. Many times, people pleasing is at its worst when there is a lot of pressure involved. What are some ways that pressure has caused you to please people instead of pleasing God?

The sight of this massive army struck fear into the hearts of the men of Israel. Nervous energy was building in the camp. An instruction had been given by the prophet Samuel that they should not fight until he arrives to make sacrifice. Days passed, but Samuel still had not arrived. The people were antsy and were beginning to abandon the camp. So Saul decided to do what every people pleaser does: take the pragmatic solution. He decided to do the sacrifice himself.

He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.

(1 Samuel 13:8-9 ESV)

The pragmatic approach isn't always the godly approach. Saul, the people pleaser, took over a role of responsibility that didn't belong to him, and it cost him far more than he could've imagined. He lost the kingdom.

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you . . . But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14 ESV)

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People pleasing always ends up costing you something. It always ends up affecting your relationships. For me, it was affecting my marriage. For Saul, it affected his entire family and his descendants. I was being religious. Saul was being religious. Both Saul and I had traded pleasing God's people for pleasing God himself. And there's a danger in that. As Christians, it is easy to become more concerned about the externals of the faith, than the internal transformation that faith is supposed to produce. The externals will make people happy, but only the internal transformation will produce a lasting joy within.

4. Have you ever allowed the external appearance of the faith to replace the internal transformation of the faith?

I don't know a believer who hasn't at some point been driven by the desire to look good. There are times where each of us are more concerned about the appearance of godliness than internal transformation. When we get into that mode of living we justify our behavior strictly by external results. When I was people pleasing, I was judging our marriage by all the externals. We didn't argue like other couples. We didn't drag our problems out for a public airing like some couples do. We were attending church, and we were tithing. We were having people into our home, we had great friends, great extended family, and I had a stable job with reasonable pay. These externals made for a good showing, but they also put me to in auto-pilot as a husband. Everything looked good, so everything had to be good, right?

Saul never learned. In fact, Saul's people pleasing led him to become a small, jealous, conspiring, and ultimately foolish king. The kingdom had been taken from Saul, but his reign as king was still his, and he still had an opportunity to repent and reign as a godly king. But because he continued to be a people pleaser, even that was ruined.

In 1 Samuel 15, God instructs Saul – through Samuel – to attack Amalek and to spare no one, not even the livestock. Saul defeated Amalek, but he did what he thought would be best instead of obeying God.

But Saul and the people spared Agag (king of Amalek) and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction. (1 Samuel 15:9 ESV)

Sometimes the command of God won't make sense to us. Why should Saul destroy the livestock? He can share it with the people. Why shouldn't Saul spare Agag? It might earn him gratitude from the people of Amalek in the future. We do this too. We second guess the command of God, believing our plan will be better and make us happier sooner.

5. What ways have you disobeyed something the Holy Spirit told you to do because you felt like your way would be better?

This kind of thinking is what ruined Saul's reign. Any chance he had for a godly rule evaporated after this act of disobedience.

And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. (1 Samuel 15:26-28 ESV)

Even though Saul continued to reign, we know that shortly after this God commanded Samuel to go anoint David as king. And the Scripture says from the moment he was anointed, the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him. Saul was still king, but he was a lame duck. David was the new anointed king, and the Spirit of God departed from Saul, and rested upon David.

Saul was a people pleaser just like I was. We all are at times. And just like Saul, when we choose to please people

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rather than please God, we risk our relationships, we risk our legacy, we risk our future ability to have any fruitfulness in God's kingdom.

6. How can people pleasing cripple your fruitfulness in the kingdom?

People pleasing may win us favor with men for a short time, but it never wins us favor with God. God has given you all his favor already in Jesus Christ. If you have been adopted into God's family all the Father's favor has already been given to you. You can't win more favor from God than you already have received in Christ. People pleasing is a symptom that you remain unsettled in God's acceptance in Jesus.

Look at King David. He was settled in his acceptance. His heart was to please God first before pleasing people. We can know this because of how he served King Saul. He loved King Saul. He served him faithfully, even when Saul was trying to kill him. Even when opportunities to kill

"The man who was truly king, anointed king, the rightful head of Israel, served the deposed king for fifteen years before actually taking the throne." Page 96

Saul and take the throne arose, David chose to please God and let him live, leaving God to be Saul's judge.

7. Where are you in this journey from people pleaser to God pleaser? What steps can you take today to step away from people pleasing?

The journey from people pleaser to God pleaser is ongoing for all of us. Some may struggle more than others, but the bottom line is that we all face this struggle. If we remain in this flesh, we will fight to please God instead of pleasing people. The thing that should alert us is finding ourselves in a place where we aren't constantly confronted with this choice. To be a God pleaser is to constantly be in a fight with the flesh. We are at war. If you're not fighting, then you're people pleasing. At the very least, you're simply *me-pleasing*.

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Fighting actually wrecks your body. It's not just the punches and potential bruises and broken bones, it's the chemistry that happens inside before a punch is even thrown. Your blood pressure skyrockets. Your adrenal glands start releasing doses of cortisol into your system (even after the fight is over) which negatively affects your immune system. Your head, neck, and shoulders tighten, leading to sore muscles even if the fight never gets physical. Chest muscles tighten and breathing rate increases, which means breathing becomes shallower, and could lead to hyperventilation. Why fight if it's going to kill you faster than not fighting? Just by the chemistry, getting angry and losing your temper will take it out of you!

In *Recreated*, I've been honest about how I wasn't much of a fighter. In fact, as a pre-teen, my skillset as a fighter came entirely from *Rocky IV*, *Karate Kid*, and professional wrestling. I know that's not the case for many of us. Some of us were the exact opposite. Some of us were brawlers and maybe drew a little enjoyment out of fighting. Some of us enjoyed the reputation that came with being tough. However, whether you're a fighter or not, Jesus enters the picture and changes all the rules.

1. What kind of person would you say you are: someone who'd rather fight, or someone who'd rather avoid conflict?

Jesus leads us into a fight. It may surprise you to learn that Jesus Christ is a fighter. Indeed, he did allow himself to be crucified, and didn't try to defend himself from those who wanted to kill him. But the fight, was not to fight! In his case, to win, he had to lose. He had to lose his life so that he could rise triumphant! And consistently what you seen in Jesus' ministry is a demonstration of how we are to fight.

"Conflict is the natural state of affairs for believers in this world." Page 101

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What that means for all of us is a relearning. We all must unlearn what we have learned. In my case, I have had to unlearn the way that I had taught myself to react to conflict.

“The kingdom of God turns everything we know about fighting on its head.” Page 104

And if you are a brawler, you too must unlearn how you react to conflict. The kingdom of God has a whole different set of rules when it comes to engaging our enemies.

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
(Matthew 5:5 ESV)*

You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:21-22 ESV)

But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (Matthew 5:39-41 ESV)

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? (1 Corinthians 6:7 ESV)

2. What about these verses goes completely contrary to how you naturally want to deal with conflict?

One of the key concepts that Christians should try to understand is meekness. Meek is not a word that we use in our everyday conversations, and on the seldom occasion that it is used, it is usually misused. My misunderstanding of this word began as a child. The first time I remember hearing it

was in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy introduces herself to the wizard as Dorothy, the small and meek. From then on, my understanding of meek was off course. To me, meekness meant weakness.

If we're going to reclaim the definition meekness, we must look to Jesus. Jesus was the personification of meekness.

3. What do we know about the identity of Jesus? What does his identity tell us about meekness?

Jesus is:

- God
- The Son of the Trinity, the Godhead
- The creative aspect of God
- The Word
- The Word spoke all things into existence from nothing

To say that Jesus is powerful would be an incredible understatement. Yet Jesus allowed himself to be crucified by his own creation.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:17-18 ESV)

Defined by Jesus' example, meekness is having the power to change or affect your circumstances, yet restraining yourself for a greater purpose.

4. What situations have you found yourself in where you had the power to do something, maybe even the right to do something, but you restrained yourself because it was the godly thing to do?

Meekness changes how we engage with conflict. In fact, as Christians, when we deal with people, this should be our defining characteristic. The world embraces a might makes right philosophy. When our rights or property are violated,

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we should be cautious about pursuing justice for ourselves. We can easily slip into a worldly way of handling conflict. The war that Christians are engaged in is seldom what it seems on the surface.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 ESV)

The enemy isn't Muslim extremists. The enemy isn't homosexuals. The enemy isn't Democrats or Republicans. We must begin seeing these men and women as pawns in Satan's strategy to erect ideologies and agendas that are contrary to the Word. They are blind, and they don't know it.

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4 ESV)

5. How do we fight? If the flesh and blood in our face isn't our true enemy, how do we advance the kingdom of God?

Know your enemies. Every Christian has two principal enemies. The first and obvious one is Satan. The second and more imminent one is the person you see in the mirror every day. You are your own worst enemy.

"No one derails your life more than you. Enemy number one is the man or woman in the mirror." Page 109

We assign more blame to Satan than he deserves. For sure, he baits the hook and lures us, but it is our fleshly desires that entice us to bite (James 1:14). Satan will never be held responsible for my failures because I choose to be enticed! We must take the war to ourselves first!

6. How do we take the war to ourselves?

There are at least five fronts to the spiritual war against ourselves.

- **Social aspect** – 1 Corinthians 15:33, Hebrews 10:25

- We must keep close friends who will build us up in our faith.
- We must remain connected to the Body of Christ in fellowship.

- **Economic aspect** – Matthew 6:21, 2 Corinthians 9:7

- Whatever we value most will capture our hearts. Your checkbook will show you what you value most.
- Christians should be marked by cheerful generosity.

- **Physical aspect** – Psalm 127:2, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

- Don't kill yourself working. God grants sleep to those who trust him.
- Food and exercise help care for your temple.
- A weak body makes you more prone to be enticed by temptation.

- **Emotional aspect** – Galatians 5:22-23

- Are you self-controlled in your emotional responses to situations?
- What is your knee jerk emotional response to conflict?
- Giving free reign to your emotions gives Satan huge opportunities

- **Spiritual aspect** – John 16:13

- The spiritual aspect of the fight has less to do with angels and demons and more to do with the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit within gives you instruction, warning, and insight. Hearing his voice is the most important spiritual discipline you need.

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7. Knowing that there are at least five fronts of the spiritual war, how will that change the way you fight?

Embracing this fight is a fight. You and I will struggle to fight for the rest of our lives. But realizing today that spiritual war is not won the same way that the world wins is crucial. Meekness, taking the fight to yourself, and fighting yourself on every front is how we war.

“When you take the war to yourself, you begin to realize that your sin is the only sin that you have time and strength to deal with.”

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During this study, we have covered several issues that have been heavy hitters in my life. Adoption, bullying, acceptance, religion, forgiveness, people pleasing, learning how to fight Kingdom-style, and hopefully along the way, even if this wasn't your experience, you've picked up something that will help you on your Jesus journey.

The overall theme of this entire book is letting Jesus transform your story. A transformed story doesn't change the facts of what happened. Rather it changes your point of view. A transformed story no longer enslaves you, but instead it becomes your servant as you share the power of Christ in your life.

1. What are some specific issues that God has revealed to you throughout the course of this study?

One of the recurring problems that we all face is we often feel defined by the moment. What is happening now is all we can see, and it can be overwhelming. In the moment, we have a hard time seeing beyond. And as that moment passes into history, it's easy to allow its influence to keep labeling us in the present.

"Your past doesn't have to cripple you." Page 127

*And we know that for those who love God **all things** work together **for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28 ESV, emphasis added)*

There are four words in this verse that every Christian needs to grab ahold of: *all things, for good*. For believers – those who love God – God doesn't waste any that happens to us. From your birth until your death, he uses everything in between to work for good. That's a hard concept to swallow.

Lined writing area for chapter seven.

2. What parts of your life do you find it hard to believe that God could use for good?

We all get seduced by the idea that the good God is working toward in our life has much to do with our circumstances. The American Dream has become very intertwined with our idea of being blessed. Equating God’s blessing with good jobs, good salaries, good reputation, nice homes, and well behaved children we have made the good that God is working toward in our life no different that the good that unsaved people can achieve all on their own. If God is transforming us into a “peculiar people” (thank you, King James) then he’s not trying to make us look just like the rest of the world.

“If he can take my failures and use them for my good, then he is greater than anything or anyone who tempts me.” Pages 128-129

Remember Joseph?

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good . . . (Genesis 50:20 ESV)

3. When Joseph talks about God’s goodness, he’s talking about wickedness inflicted upon him by other people. Why are we so quick to blame Satan for evil committed against us when God is the one behind the curtain?

The critical error that we have believed is that persecution is from Satan. As believers we have assigned all of our troubles, all of our woes, all of our misfortunes to the Devil because he is a “roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” but we have missed something in our haste to assign blame.

God is the one who threw Joseph in the pit. God is the one who sold him into slavery. God is the one who accused him of rape. All so Joseph could rise to the position which he did and save many! I know that may not sit well with your

notions about a loving Father, but look at Genesis 50:20 closely: God meant it for good. The evil that happened to Joseph may have been committed by evil men and women, but God was the orchestrator.

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is **tested by fire**—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

(1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV, emphasis added)

God subjects his children to the fires of trials to bring forth the genuineness of our faith. John the Baptist referred to it as being baptized with fire (Matthew 3:11). God uses our suffering to bring forth the good that he is working toward.

“We are baptized by fire, or into suffering. Economic hardship? War? Drought? Disease? Everyone suffers these, but the fire that is judgment for the unbeliever is refining for the believer!” Page 130

4. If the good God is working toward in your life isn't about your circumstances, then what is it?

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29 ESV, emphasis added)*

The good God is working toward is that we would be like Jesus. And he uses *all things*. Whether it's what you're going through now, or if it's something that happened to you way back when, even before you were a Christian, all of it is manure that will help you grow into someone who is *conformed to the image of his Son*.

Chapter Seven: Our Victor

5. How do you view your suffering?

The world has many answers to the reason for suffering. Karma? Bad luck? If you're a Christian, you should never categorize your suffering in such a way. Even sufferings that result from your own poor choices, God will use for redemptive work in your life.

"Expect hard things. But also expect God to do amazing things with your hard things!" Page 131

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 ESV)

James tells us to do something that is humanly impossible. We are to take joy from our suffering. That doesn't mean we enjoy our suffering. But it does mean that our suffering should produce joy. That means we must endure our trials to the end. No shortcuts out, no compromise. When we're in the midst of suffering, the temptation is often to find the quickest exit. What we fail to see is that the nearest exit is often a compromise. Shortcuts in your spiritual life always come with a cost, and only lead you back to where you started.

Endure! The joy is found in the outcome of the trial. The outcome is the good that God has been working toward. Your attitude toward your suffering will make the difference in how you live your life and how you make decisions. Do you see your trials as unjust or unfair? Do you see your suffering as undeserving? Or will you start to see them as refining fires that are transforming you into the likeness of Christ?

6. How is this humanly impossible task accomplished? How do we go from running away from suffering to patiently enduring it and gaining joy in the outcome?

Chapter Seven: Our Victor

*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.
(2 Corinthians 2:14 ESV)*

The only thing in your life that prevents Jesus from leading you in triumphal procession is you. Do you believe Jesus can transform your entire story? Do you believe that even your worst moment can be used to bring redemption, not only to you, but to others? If you wrestle with believing that, you have a stronghold that will not only stunt your spiritual growth, but will be a source of constant trial and suffering in your life until it is demolished.

7. Today, what strongholds of thinking needs to be torn down for you to let Jesus be your Victor in all things?

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Final Words...

I hope this study guide has been a help to you on your journey with Jesus Christ. I know that not everyone who has gone through this study took the time to read Recreated. That's completely fine. Not all of us are readers. Once upon a time, neither was I. I feel like ending this study guide without addressing one final important topic would be shortsighted.

It's entirely possible that you've gone through this study and you're still scratching your head on some things. I encourage you to revisit them and allow God the freedom to uncover things in your heart. Transformation is a process.

But there may be some of you who don't understand for a different reason. Spiritual truths can only be understood by a person who has been born again. The Holy Spirit is inside of the believer and helps with understanding. If you have never been born again, much of what Recreated and this study guide covers won't make sense.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, I want to share a segment from the closing of Recreated that will help you know what you must do to be saved and receive the new birth.

The details of your life are what they are; you can't change them. But Jesus can enter in and take the mess that you believe your life is and recreate you into a new man or woman who never would've existed otherwise. Dead people can't change anything on their own. They're dead. But Jesus, who calls the dead to life, can call you out of your deadness and give you a new life. You only need to trust him for salvation. You cannot save yourself, and to receive salvation, you have to abandon all of your own efforts and simply trust that Jesus is your only hope for salvation.

How can this be done? It actually isn't rocket science. The Bible tells us that it's very simple.

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9 ESV)

There's an element of confession, which means you must speak. Speak what? Some people call it a sinner's prayer but at its core it means to confess to God that you believe Jesus Christ is the Lord of all. Confession also means you repent of the sin in your life. To repent is to turn away from the things in your life that displease God and embrace things that do.

Then there's an element of belief. You believe in your heart, not your head, that God raised Jesus from the dead. That means you believe he's alive right now at the emotional center of your life. With every emotion in your being, you believe that Jesus Christ is just as alive right now as you are. It's far more than intellectual belief. It's more than a wish, or a hope. It's a reality just as real and constant to you as the rising and setting of the sun. You know it's true in your heart, even though your eyes can't confirm.

This is what it means to be saved. To have a mouth that repents and confesses Jesus, and to have a heart that has intertwined every emotion, every feeling in your life with the reality that Jesus Christ is alive today because God raised him from the dead. And once you're his, once you're born again into this saved life; life as you knew it will forever be different. You'll never look at your past again the same way. You'll never dream of the future the same way. And your present will be lived in a power that you never had before.

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