

**“How to Make a Fresh Start”
Isa. 43:18,19**

Isaiah 43:18 The LORD says, “Forget what happened before, and do not think about the past.

19 Look at the new thing I am going to do. It is already happening. Don’t you see it? I will make a road in the desert and rivers in the dry land.

Big Idea – God wants to do a new thing in my life.

Intro: How many of you here this morning would like to have a fresh start in your Christian life? All of us here this morning have made many mistakes in our lives as Christians. Sometimes we allow these mistakes, these setbacks and failures to enslave us to the point that we never enjoy the full Christian life that God has given us to enjoy. It’s what Attorney Greg Reed preached about last Sunday, like eagles pecking in the barnyard of life!

In John 10:10 Jesus said, “I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.”

He also warned us we have an adversary, called the Devil, that seeks to steal, kill and destroy that life. The Devil will remind us of our past in order to keep us from enjoying the life that God gave us to live. The Devil does not want you to have a fresh start in life.

The good news is, God says, “I want you to have a fresh start in life, I want you to have a new beginning, I want to do something new in your life.” Aren’t you glad that God wants to do something new in your life? Doesn’t it make you excited to know that God desires to give you a fresh start, a new beginning in life.

What all of us here need this morning is a Fresh Start, a New Beginning with God. Last year some of you said, “I am going to grow in my relationship with God. I am going to pray more, read my Bible more and get more involved in my church. I’m going to spend more quality time with my family.” The list could go on. The fact is all of us here made some mistakes or we made some bad decision that hindered us from doing those things that wanted to do.

Well this morning the good news is according to Isaiah 43:18 “The Lord says, `Forget about what has happened before. Do not think about the past. Instead, look at the new things I’m going to do.” Listen to what God is saying in this verse. Forget about what’s happened before. He says don’t think about the past. It’s over. The book’s closed on it.

We need to understand that God is far more interested in our future than He is in our past. Some people think that God is stuck on their past. That all He wants to do is remind them of the things that they have done wrong. God is more interested in your future than He is with your past. That’s where you’re going to spend the rest of your life. He says, “Forget about your past. Forget about the former things. Don’t think about it. Look at the new thing I’m going to do.”

Israel was being punished for their sins and rebellion against God. God wanted to give hope and encouragement to His people. He wanted them to know that even though they were being punished they were not being forsaken. God wanted His people to understand that the punishment that they were experiencing would not be the end of them. The fact is that God wanted to give them a fresh start in life, a new Beginning in life.

Israel no doubt was discouraged because they thought this was the end of them, that they had gone too far, they had sinned and rebelled against God to the point that He would no longer be their God.

Maybe they thought God would not deliver us again, it’s over.

Maybe that is where you are this morning! You feel that you have made so many mistakes, you have failed God so many times and you have sinned it all away. Now you think God doesn’t want anything to do with you. You feel and believe

that you have no future with God. The good news is, God is saying, "It's not over, I have plans for your life. I am about to do something new for you."

A formula for starting over is S.T.A.R.T. Maybe you'll remember this and pass it along to friends when they have failures. Regardless of what kind of failure you had in the past. You may have had a financial failure, or maybe a relational failure, a failure in your marriage. You may have had a moral failure. You may have really blown it and you may have made some decisions you're so ashamed of and hope nobody ever finds out about. Regardless of the failure you've had in your life, here's how you start over.

1. Stop making excuses – accept responsibility for my life

Galatians 6:5 "Each person must be responsible for himself."

The King James Version says, "For every man shall bear his own burden. "

If I want a fresh start in life, I have to stop making excuses for my failures. I've got to stop blaming other people. I've got to stop seeing myself as the victim of my circumstances.

3 kinds of people in life:

Accusers

Excusers

Choosers

There are accusers. They always blame everybody else for their problems. Their favorite phrase is, "It's all your fault." It's never my fault. It's someone else's fault.

There are the excusers. Excusers are people that always have an excuse for not making a decision or doing something. There's always a reason why they can't make the most or get the most out of their year. In the long run they end up being the losers. I've discovered that whenever I want to procrastinate on something, any excuse will do. The Bible says, "A lazy man is full of excuses."

There are the choosers, they say, "I choose to accept responsibility for my own life, goals and happiness. I'm not dependent upon somebody else. I choose the direction of my life." I'm not depending upon the crowd.

Other people can hurt us, other people can harm us, and other people can scar us. But the only person that can ruin your life is you. Nobody can ruin your life without your permission. You have a choice and that is you can choose how you're going to respond to those hurts.

The Bible says that the starting point is to just be honest and accept responsibility for my part in the problem.

Proverbs 28:13 "A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them he gets another chance."

He gets a fresh start. He says the starting point to starting over is to be honest and face up to the problems, that most of the problems in my life, most of the failures, are my fault.

It is hard to get people to admit when they are wrong. People do not like to admit, "I made a mistake, and I blew it." God says, "That if we admit the mistake, if we admit our failures, and if we admit our sin, then we get another chance in life.

3 reasons we fail:

We fail to plan ahead

Prov. 20:7 "A sensible man watches for problems and prepares to meet them but the fool never looks ahead and suffers the consequences."

Was it raining when Noah started building the ark? No. He had to prepare for the coming flood. In fact the rain didn't come for 120 years. But that's how long it took him to get the thing built.

We won't listen to others' good advice

Prov. 15:22 "Plans fail without good advice." KJV says, Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

You need to get all the advice you can. Get good advice from people you know you can trust.

Why won't people listen to the advice of other people? Because they think they don't need it. It's called pride. Ego. Ego stands for "Edging God Out." When a person thinks they know more than God, they push Him out of their life, they're on an ego trip and that trip leads to a dead end.

The Bible says, "Pride always leads to destruction."

An arrogant attitude leads to a fall. When you think you know it all and can figure it all out yourself, you're setting yourself up for failure.

If you don't listen to the advice of others, if you won't listen to the advice of your wife/husband/boss or other people around you, if you think you'll just do it your way. You'll never get anywhere if you think you have already arrived. That's what pride does to you!

We give up too soon

Proverbs 24:10 "If you give up when troubles come, it just shows that you are weak." If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small."

Failure is the path of least resistance. The problem is that often during trying times we stop trying. We give up.

If at first you don't succeed, welcome to the human race. If at first you don't succeed, you're normal. Very few people make it on the first try. Oftentimes, we give up just when success is around the corner. You're never a failure until you give up. Sometimes we give up too soon.

It's always too soon to quit. The Bible says we need to stop making excuses, admit when it's our fault and get on with life. I've discovered that people who are very good at making excuses are rarely good at anything else. They spend all their energy thinking up reasons why they can't do what they're supposed to do.

2. Take inventory of my life –

Galatians 3:4 "You have experienced many things. Were all those experiences wasted? I hope not."

Learn from your mistakes. Failure can be your friend or your foe. You determine if failure will be your friend or foe by the way you react to it.

You can choose to learn from it or choose to repeat it.

If you learn from it then it can be your friend.
But, if you don't learn from it is your foe.

One day I looked at myself—at the self that Christ can see;
I saw the person I am today and the one I ought to be.
I saw how little I really pray and how little I really do;
I saw the influence of my life—how little of it was true!

I saw the bundle of faults and fears I ought to lay on the shelf;
I had given a little bit to God, but I hadn't given myself!

I came from seeing myself, with my mind made up to be—
The sort of person that Christ can use, with a heart He may always see.

4 kinds of experiences that God uses to shape our lives.

>He uses personal experiences. The family that you grew up in, the people you relate to now. God can use your personal experience with your husband or your wife.

>He uses work and school experiences to shape you.

>He uses spiritual experiences to shape you, like church, having a quiet time, being in a small group.

>He uses painful experiences to shape you.

As you take inventory of your life ask yourself three questions.

· What have I learned? I know people 40, 50 years old but they don't have 40 or 50 years of experience. They've had the same year of experience over and over. They've never learned anything. What have you learned from past experiences? If you don't sit down and think it through, you'll end up repeating the same mistake over and over again because you didn't learn from it the first time.

· What are my assets? What have I got going for me? Have I got my health? Have I got my freedom? Am I still mentally sound? Have I got some friends? Have I got the Lord? Have I got a church family? What do I have that I can get a fresh start with?

· Who can help me? When we need a fresh start, we need somebody by our side – a friend, an accountability partner, a support person, or a support group. Find someone that can help you. You need other people because you don't start over by yourself after a major setback or crisis. You need somebody else to walk along with you. There is one that we can count on to be there to help us to get a fresh start in life. The Lord Jesus will be there,

Phil. 4:11 "...I have learned... Paul said.

3. Act in faith – believe I can change with God's help

This is the third step in getting a fresh start. Act in faith. You have to launch out. The Bible says that the key to changing anything is faith. If you want to change your circumstances, it takes faith. If you want to change your personality, it takes faith. If you want to change anything in your life, you have to have faith.

Jesus says this in Matthew 9:29 "According to your faith it will be done to you."

That is a very simple statement but it's very powerful. "That means we tend to get out of life what we expect, what we believe God for. "According to your faith it will be done to you."

What are you expecting in life? Are things going to be better or worse? Are they going to be the same? If you act in faith, then you will do something positive to ensure that you don't repeat the same mistakes over.

The faith that I am talking about is not a dead, hope so faith. It is an affirmative faith that takes positive action coupled with the help of God to change your life.

In order to start acting in faith that means you've got to stop having a pity party. You've got to stop feeling sorry for yourself. "Poor me! I'm such a victim. Life is unfair."

Of course life is unfair! Whoever said it was fair? God never said that. This is a world filled with sin and because of that, life is unfair.

But you have to go on with life anyway. You stop having a pity party and stop rehearsing the past, regretting the past, and you get on with the present and the future. The more time we spend regretting our past, the more of our future is wasted. The more time you spend thinking, "I wish that hadn't happened! I wish I could change that. If only I could go back, reverse the clock and redo history," and you're rehearsing and regretting, you'll not only make yourself miserable right now, you're setting yourself up for more of the same thing in the future.

The way you set yourself up for more failure is by focusing on past failures. Whatever you focus on you tend to reproduce in your life. "According to your faith it will be done unto you."

What you need to do is learn from those failures. Let me give you the real secret of success. Every successful entrepreneur knows this.

Real success is built on failure. Failure is the way you become a success. You figure out what doesn't work. When Edison figured out on the 200th or so time, what would make a light bulb stay lit, he did that because he knew 199 ways that didn't work. You never call it a failure in your life. Call it an education. You learn from past failures and mistakes and act in faith for the future. Some people will never act in faith because they have been paralyzed by the fear of past failures and mistakes.

What we need to do is learn from the past, act in faith for the future and look to God for guidance.

How do you get rid of fear of failure? Faith. That's why the third step in starting over is Act in faith. Faith is not so much the absence of fear, as it is moving ahead in spite of your fear. Sometimes faith is doing the thing you fear the most.

Stop worrying about what others say or think. Proverbs 29:25 "Being afraid of people can get you into trouble."

Another translation says, "The fear of man is a dangerous trap, but to trust in God means safety."

4. Refocus – change your thinking. How?

Col. 3:1,2 "Since you were raised to new life with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God."

Set (focus) your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

I need to refocus my thoughts if I want to change my life. If I want to get going again, if I want a fresh start, I need to rethink the way that I think. I need to change my mind about a number of issues.

Proverbs 4:23 "Be careful how you think. Your life is shaped by your thoughts." Attitudes determine actions!

The way you think, determines the way you feel. And the way you feel determines the way you act. If you want to change your actions, just change the way you think and it will inevitably change the way you act. If you are depressed, discouraged and distressed it may be because you're thinking depressed, discouraged and distressing thoughts. That's your choice. You don't have to think those thoughts. If you're acting in fearful, worried ways it's because you're thinking fearful, worried thoughts.

Romans 12:2 "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. "

If I have to refocus my thoughts to start over to get a fresh start, that means I have to stop thinking some old patterns. Which memories are you still rehearsing that keep you from having a fresh start in life? The Bible says let go. Let go of those things.

The more you hold on to that memory, the more you rehearse it, it continues to hurt you today. It cannot hurt you without your permission. You have to change your mind and let go and get rid of those painful, hurtful memories of shame and guilt and other things.

How do you do that?

Confession – 1 John 1:9

(Review first 3 points and start next week here)

You say, "I've confessed to God but I still feel guilty. How do I get rid of a painful memory?" Not by resisting it but by replacing it. Not saying, "I'm not going to think about it! I'm not going to think about it!" What are you doing the whole time? Thinking about it. Stop focusing on what you don't want and start focusing on what you do want. Get your attention onto something else. Refocus. Replace those memories by, every time they come up, start thinking about something else. Focus on something else.

Replace negatives with positives, sins with good things

Eph. 4:22-24

1. Put off the old man
2. Renew your mind
3. Put on the new man

Meditate on God's truths

Psalm 1 "Happy are those who are always meditating on God's word. They're like trees along a river that do not dry up. They succeed in everything they do."

Those are the two things that everybody wants in life. We all want to be happy and we all want to succeed. The antidote, the answer, the way we get those is the phrase right in the middle " meditating on God's word. "

That's the answer to the other two. The more you meditate on God's word, the happier and more successful you'll be in Your Christian life. It's a promise from God.

Meditating on God's word simply means rehearsing God's word in our minds.

Joshua 1:8 "Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do."

It's interesting that the Bible does not say, "If you read this book, you'll be happy and successful." It does not say, "If you listen to this book, like through a sermon, you'll be happy and successful."

It says, "If you meditate on it you'll be happy and successful." In meditating it means I think on it over and over and what it means in my life. I consider it and consider its implications for my life.

As we fill our mind with God's word, it begins to change our mind. We stop seeing ourselves as other people see us or as we have seen ourselves and we begin to see ourselves as God does. That's where the change takes place. That's the power to start over.

5. Trust God to help you:

Forget the past

Paul gave this advice "Forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus." Phil 3:13-14 That advice from God's Word has stood the test of time. I don't know of any more relevant and practical advice for us at the start of 2018.

For many of us our failures are painful memories. Maybe for you it is a memory of how you failed in a relationship. You made the wrong decisions, said and did the wrong things and the relationship ended.

Some of you who are parents probably know that you failed your children in some way, many of us are aware that we have failed our parents and it's more than likely that many of us know that most of all we have failed ourselves in some ways.

What God's Word is saying is that we must not allow ourselves to be bogged down by our past failures.

I think that the start of New Year is a good time for you to rise to that challenge. To say to yourself I am going to, with help of God, forget my past. I am going to stop torturing myself about what I did or didn't do. This New Year is a good time to stop being chained to your past failures. God is saying here in His Word that he doesn't want you to go through your life branding yourself as a failure.

On the Cross died so that he could forgive. When we become Christians on purpose that forgiveness becomes a reality in our lives. When we have received Christ's forgiveness it allows us to forgive ourselves and forget our failures.

Do you need to do that? Right here this morning do you need to accept Jesus forgiveness and then forgive yourself?

Forgive and let go of grudges

"Bear with each other and forgive each other whatever grievances (grudges) you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" Col 3:13

God in those words is challenging you directly and personally to give up your grudges. That is what he means when he says forgive each other whatever grievances you may have against one another.

What's a grudge? A grudge is a deep ongoing resentment that we cultivate in our hearts against someone else.

A grudge is an unforgiving spirit that leads to unforgiving attitudes and unforgiving actions.

I know you know what I am talking about.

Harboring a grudge is about nursing a dislike for someone.

What you need to know is that grudges are dangerous because they are destructive.

Grudges destroy marriages.

Grudges break up families.

Grudges ruin friendships.

Grudges split churches.

Let's be honest enough to admit that one of the scandals of the Church is the grudges that Christians hold against one another.

Today if you know you are holding a grudge against someone then God has something to say to you. He says "give it up."

I want to remind you that grudges are not just destructive they are also self-destructive. When you hold a grudge against someone you will hurt yourself as much and perhaps more than you will hurt the person you are holding it against.

Make no mistake about it, if you keep harboring a grudge then it will eventually destroy you, if not physically, certainly emotionally and spiritually. It will make you a bitter and twisted person.

The book of Job in chap 21 describes people who live and die with bitter hearts."

Job 21:25 "...another person dies with an unhappy heart, never enjoying any happiness."

Do you really want that to be your epitaph?

Do you remember that parable that Jesus told about the servant who was forgiven a huge debt by the king and then refused to forgive someone else a tiny amount? Jesus said his unforgiving spirit landed him in prison.

Max Lucado makes this interesting comment in one his books. He says, "Unforgiving servants always end up in prison. Prisons of anger, guilt and depression."

God says to you in His word "don't sentence yourself to prison." Set yourself free. Give up your grudges "forgive each other whatever grievances you may have against one another."

According to God's Word the way to give up a grudge is to forgive a grievance. Notice what God is saying here.

He isn't asking you to ignore whatever the person has done to you.

He isn't asking you to pretend it did not happen.

He doesn't ask you to condone it, to pretend it didn't matter.

What God asks you to do is to forgive the grievance. That means to acknowledge how wrong and painful what was done to you was, but to decide to forgive the person who did the wrong to you.

I am absolutely certain that there are people here who need to give up their grudges and forgive the grievance they have against someone else.

Some of you need to forgive the grievance you have against your parents for what they did or didn't do.

Some of you need to forgive your children for the same reason.

Some of you need to forgive a partner for emotional or physical abuse.

Some of you need to give up the grudge you have against someone at work because of the way they have treated you.

Some of you need to give up the grudge that stems from an argument you had with someone.

Some of you probably need to give up grudges you have against other people in this congregation.

God says that that deep-seated resentment you have against that person has to go. What better time to make that difficult decision to forgive than the start of a new year?

Now don't tell God you can't forgive, because what you really mean when you say that is that you won't forgive. If Christ can forgive you your sin despite it involving the pain of the cross then surely you can give up your grievance whatever the cost?

The question is will you do it?

Focus on the future

The month of January on the calendar was named for the Roman god, Janus. He was known as the “gate god.” And an image of him was placed at the entrance gate of each city in the Roman Empire. The reason Janus received such honor was because he had two faces. This meant that he could see in two directions at the same time.

Philippians 3:13 “...I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,
14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”

Each new year we need to take at least a two-way look so that we can have a proper appreciation of the past and a bright outlook for the future. That’s the whole purpose of self-evaluation. It’s a good thing to say, “I resolve in my heart.”

It’s better to make resolutions and keep them for a while than never to have made them at all!

Let’s look at some Bible characters and the resolutions they made.

Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself. He would not eat pork or drink wine because they were forbidden by the Lord. He defied the king’s orders. But he didn’t lose out. He earned the admiration and respect of his captors because he didn’t compromise his convictions.

Jacob resolved to bring his tithe to the Lord. At Bethel he had a dream—angels going up and down a ladder. When he awoke, he looked up to God and said, “If you go with me, I will live for You and surely give you one tenth of all I shall earn.” He had nothing to call his own when he made that vow and he didn’t keep it faithfully. But when he did, God heaped rich blessings upon him.

David made two resolutions: (1) to read the Scriptures and adopt them as the standard of his life; (2) to be a man of prayer: “Because he has inclined his ear to me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.”

Paul made a resolution to be a soul-winner. What a marvelous thing it would be if every one of us would resolve to win one person to the Lord in the new year!

I believe we should look to the future with optimism and excitement. Why? Because it is an unspoiled page in my book of time. It is my opportunity to practice what I’ve learned the past 12 months and to renew my allegiance to Christ who said, “Behold, I make all things new.” The New Year also affords me an opportunity to grow in my faith and be more consistent in living it out.

Illustration: “A Beauty a Day”

One day a college girl was tacking her calendar for the new year on her dorm room wall. She said to her roommate, “It’s going to be a beautiful year!” “How do you know that?” asked her roommate. “Well,” she replied, “a day isn’t a long time and I know It’s going to be beautiful because I’m going to take a day at a time and make it so. I will see that every one of those 365 days gets at least one beautiful thing into it through my efforts.”

Wow! Now that’s the way to live.

This kind of attitude is also expressed in a poem by Avis Christiansen, called, “Another Year.”

“Another year is dawning—a path unknown, untried.
‘Twould fill me with foreboding, had I no hand to guide;
But He who walked beside me, all through the yesteryear,
Whatever may betide me, has promised to be near.

Another year with Jesus! Ah, then, no dread I know;
His love is ever precious, how 'er the winds may blow.
E'en when the storm is fiercest, in Him my soul may rest,
And find sweet peace and comfort upon His lovely breast.

Another year to trust Him—yes I can trust Him still,
Who has never yet failed me—as I have sought His will.
His rod and staff He giveth, to be my strength and stay,
And tenderly He leadeth along the homeward way.”