

A New Year, A New You

Sterling UMC
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Isaiah 43:18-19

There is an old story about a happy little boy who went out into the field wearing a baseball cap. In one hand he carried a baseball, and in the other a baseball bat. His face bore a look of tremendous confidence. Cocking his bat, he tossed the ball into the air, saying, "I'm the greatest batter in the world!" Then he swung and missed. "Strike one," he said.

He picked up the ball, examined it, and then threw it into the air again. As he swung, he repeated, "I'm the greatest batter in the world." Once again he missed. "Strike two," he said.

This time, he stopped to examine his bat to make sure there wasn't a hole in it. Then he picked up the ball, adjusted his cap, and tossed the ball into the air for the 3rd time.

He repeated again, "I'm the greatest batter in the world," and swung with all his might - and missed for the 3rd straight time. "Wow" he cried, "What a pitcher. I'm the greatest pitcher in the world!"

Today we are 1 week into a new year. As we look back over the last 12 months, I'm not sure whether most of us would be considered pitchers or batters. One thing for sure, at times we have all struck out. At this time of year we often make resolutions about things that we want to change in our lives. Often those resolutions deal with things like our health; we want to eat less and exercise more. Sometimes they are regarding the way we manage our money; we resolve to spend less and save more. At other times we make resolutions about getting more organized, spending more time with our families, making better use of our time, etc. There are some of us who even made resolutions as they relate to our spiritual life. 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.

I don't know about you but today is the 9th day of the new year and many of those resolutions I made only 9 short days ago have fallen by the wayside.

Commitments unfulfilled. Promises broken. Bad habits unchanged.

Today we are beginning a new sermon series entitled "A New Year A New You." Over the next several weeks we will look at some of the most popular resolutions we make and seek to get some biblical perspective on how to make the positive changes we desire in our lives with God's help. We will look at things like food with a message entitled "You are What You Eat." Then we will look at our resolution to better manage our money with, "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is." Finally we will look at the growing trend of technology to monopolize our lives with a message, "E-life vs. Real Life."

This morning I want to begin with the foundation. For you see we cannot begin to make changes without first getting to the core of our lives. That is where true change begins.

This morning the good news comes to us in the words of the prophet Isaiah. In these verses we find that Israel was going through a very difficult period in their history. They had been taken into captivity. They were suffering because of their rebellion and spiritual failure. But God speaking through his prophet Isaiah wanted to give hope and encouragement to His people. He wanted them to know that even though they were suffering they had not been forsaken. God wanted His people to understand that the pain 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.

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. "

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.

Like the little boy with the bat, may I suggest that your attitude, your frame of mind, your reaction to its events will largely determine whether it is a year of victory or a year of defeat. So what does it take for us to make a fresh start?

I want to share with you a formula for starting over. S.T.A.R.T.

S – Stop making excuses.

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.

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."

Therefore the starting point is to be honest and face the fact 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, "If we confess our sins he his faithful and just and cleanses us from all unrighteousness."

In other words, if we admit our mistakes, if we admit our failures, and if we admit our sin, then we get another chance in life.

T - Take An Inventory Of My Life

I need to take an inventory of my life. That means I need to evaluate all my experiences. I need to take an inventory of my life's experiences and learn from them.

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

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

God uses all kinds of experiences to shape our lives. As you take inventory of your life in starting over, you need to ask yourself three questions.

- What have I learned? 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? What strengths do I have for the journey? What resources 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. 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, He will help you to pull your life back together and make sure that you get started on the right foot.

A - Act in faith

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

“Get out of the boat.”

“Lord, if it is you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

Fear cripples us. It is Satan's greatest tool to keep us from anything worthwhile for the Lord. Fear of the unknown. Fear of failure. Fear of rejection. Fear of what others may say or think.

How do you get rid of fear? 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, but like Peter knowing that when we take that first step of faith there is a strong arm to grasp hold of us and keep us from sinking.

R – Refocus my thoughts

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."

If you are willing to change your thinking, you can change your feelings. If you change your feelings, you can change your actions. If change your actions you change your life.

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

How do you do that? The best way you can do that is to focus on God's Word.

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.

T – Trust God

Trust God to help us succeed. Depend on Him. We don't need to depend on ourselves. We've already proven that we can't do it on our own. That's why we've failed. Some people just don't get it. They stumble and fall and then they get up and say, "I'll just try harder!" It's like you go up to a wall and bang your head against it and the wall doesn't fall down. You try it again and Bang! Again. You keep doing it thinking, "Maybe it will fall over this time." That's the definition of insanity – doing the same thing over and over and over and expecting different results. If we keep doing the same thing then we will keep getting the same result. Success in the Christian life is not trying harder, but living smarter. Giving God control of my life.

Zechariah 4:6, "You will not succeed by your own strength or power but by My Spirit, says the Lord."

Will you have a fresh start in life? Will you have a new beginning? It's your choice. How can I have a fresh start? I can have a fresh start by:

- Stop making excuse
- Take an inventory of my life
- Act in faith
- Refocus my thoughts
- Trust God

If we do these things then when next new year roles around you will be a different person. And we will be a different church.