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SERMON TITLE

A Fresh Start

SERIES

DATE

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KEY SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 43:18-19

SYNOPSIS

A Fresh Start begins with one step at a time.

HIGHLIGHTS





☞ A Fresh Start

Good morning, everyone! Happy New Year! And welcome to the first Sunday of 2026. There's something special about this morning. Three hundred and sixty-one blank pages are waiting to be written. It's a new year, a new day, and a chance for a fresh start.

Before we dive in, let me ask you something. How many of you made New Year's resolutions this year? Now, how many of you made the *same* New Year's resolutions you made last year? Did you know gym memberships spike by about 40% in January? There's actually a name for the second Friday in January—they call it "Quitter's Day" because that's when most people abandon their resolutions. Very often our resolutions regarding our faith-walk are much like this.

But here's the deal: the problem isn't that we can't make a change. The problem is that we're trying to manufacture it through sheer force of will, and we're doing it alone. We're approaching life like it's a *self-improvement* project when God intended it to be a transformation journey *with Him*. He's really, really good at second chances and new beginnings.

☞ God Specializes in Fresh Starts

Isaiah 43:18-19 says: **"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"** Now, context matters here. Isaiah is speaking to the Israelites who are in exile in Babylon. They've lost everything—their homes, their temple, their freedom. They're sitting in a foreign land, wondering if God has forgotten them. And what does God say? "Forget the former things." Not "forget the good old days," but forget being defined by your failures and losses. We all have "if only" moments, or "I should have" memories. Don't get stuck there.

Because God says, *"I am doing a new thing."* Present tense. Not "I did a thing back in Egypt when ☞ I parted the Red Sea." No. "I **AM** doing." **Right now.** In your mess. In your exile. In your disappointment. **God is actively at work.**

And this theme runs throughout the entire Bible. Think about it:

- Noah steps out of the ark onto a washed-clean earth—fresh start.
- Abraham leaves everything familiar at age 75 to follow God— fresh start.
- Moses leads the people out of slavery— fresh start.
- Joshua crosses the Jordan into the Promised Land— fresh start.
- The remnant returns from exile to rebuild Jerusalem— fresh start.
- Peter, after denying Jesus three times, is restored and becomes a church leader— fresh start.

And then there's **2 Corinthians 5:17**: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* This connects directly to what Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:3**—"You must be born again." Not just improved. Not just reformed. *Born again.* A complete restart. Our **God doesn't do minor renovations. He does resurrections.**



So as we start this year together, if you're hoping to make some changes, here are a few thoughts that might be helpful in your pursuit.

☞ 1: Your Past Does Not Determine Your Future

Let me tell you about a guy I heard of named David. *David had spent fifteen years addicted to drugs and alcohol. Lost his family. Lost his job. Lost his home. Ended up living in his car. He said, "I had convinced myself that I was just a screw-up. That's who I was. I'd failed so many times that failure became my identity." But then something shifted. David encountered the grace of God—not through some dramatic moment, but through a persistent friend who kept inviting him to church. Kept showing up with coffee. Kept treating him like he was worth something. David then said, "The hardest part wasn't getting sober. The hardest part was believing that God could actually use someone like me. That I wasn't just 'David the addict' anymore." Today? David runs a recovery ministry that's helped hundreds of people. But here's what he says: "I didn't become a new person by trying harder. I became a new person by believing that what God said about me was truer than what my past said about me."*

Now let's talk about King David. This is a guy who committed adultery with Bathsheba, then had her husband murdered to cover it up. That's pretty much the definition of a catastrophic moral failure. And yet, when David repents, in **Psalms 51:10**, he prays, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

David doesn't say, "Fix me up a little bit." He says *create*. That's the same word used in **Genesis 1:1**—"In the beginning, God *created* the heavens and the earth." David is asking for the kind of divine intervention that brings something into existence that wasn't there before. And you know what? God does it. Not only does God forgive David, but Jesus is called "the Son of David." The Messiah comes through David's line. God doesn't erase David's story—He redeems it.

This is the same God who changed Simon the unstable fisherman into Peter the rock (**Matthew 16:18**). Who transformed Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle (**Acts 9**). Who took Rahab the prostitute and put her in the lineage of Jesus (**Matthew 1:5**).

Your past is not your prison unless you choose to stay locked in it. Here's what I need you to hear: **God's not surprised by your past.** He's not up in heaven going, "Oh no, I didn't see *that* coming!" He knew every mistake you'd make before you made it, and He still calls you His beloved child. You may have seen the Facebook meme that says, "When God put a calling on your life he already factored in your stupidity." And, we could add, "your mistakes and failures." ☞ **Romans 8:1** says, "**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" No condemnation. That argument you keep having with yourself about whether you're good enough? God already settled it at the cross. Your past does not define your future.

☞ 2: Small Steps of Faith Lead to Extraordinary Destinations



I heard about a guy who decided to run a marathon. He had a brilliant plan. He was going to go from someone who doesn't run at all to someone who runs 26.2 miles. And in his infinite wisdom, he decided the best way to start was by running five miles on day one. Because, you know, go big or go home, right? He didn't make it a mile. He made it about a quarter mile before he thought he was dying. His wife found him sitting on the curb questioning all his life choices.

We do this with our spiritual lives all the time. We want the complete transformation *now*. We want to go from spiritually struggling to spiritual giant overnight. And when we don't, we get discouraged and quit. But look at how God works. In **Exodus 13**, it says that when God led the Israelites out of Egypt he took them the long way on purpose. He knew they weren't ready for the shortcut. **They needed the journey to prepare them for the destination.**

Proverbs 16:9 tells us, *"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps."* Not giant leaps. Steps. One foot in front of the other. When Jesus discipled the twelve he didn't download three years of theology into their heads on day one. He walked with them. He showed them. It was progressive. It was gradual. It was relational. It was a step at a time.

☞ So **what's your next step?** Not your next ten steps. Not your five-year plan. Your *next* step.

Want to strengthen your prayer life? Don't commit to praying three hours a day. Start with five minutes tonight or tomorrow morning. Just five.

Want to repair a broken relationship? Don't worry about resolving the whole thing. Just send the text. Make the call. Say, "I've been thinking about you. Can we talk?"

Want to serve others more? Don't try to revolutionize the entire church's outreach ministry. Sign up for one opportunity this month. Serve at the food pantry once. Visit one person who's homebound.

God isn't asking you to leap over a tall building in a single bound. He's asking you to trust Him with the next step. And then the next one. And the one after that. That's how you get to *extraordinary* destinations—one *ordinary* step at a time.

☞ **3: You Were Made for Community, and Community Was Made for You**

Have you ever gone through a season of personal struggle where everything was hard and you were nearly overwhelmed with discouragement? Felt like you were a total failure? The all-too-common temptation during those times is to isolate... to try to get it together before being honest with others. Well, that **isolation can destroy you** even more effectively than the struggles you're facing. We all need each other.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says, *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep*



warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not easily broken."

This isn't just nice poetry. This is a survival strategy. The early church in **Acts 2** shared everything. They met together daily. They didn't just see each other on Sundays. They did life together. And Paul reinforces this throughout his letters. **Romans 12:15**: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." **Galatians 6:2**: "Carry each other's burdens." **Hebrews 10:24-25**: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another."

One of the enemy's greatest weapons is isolation. He wants you to believe you're alone in your struggles. That everyone else has their act together and you're the only one who's a mess. But that's a lie. The truth is, we're all a little bit of a mess. We're all struggling with something. And when we have the courage to be honest about that with each other, something amazing happens. We realize we're not alone. We realize we're not crazy.

☞ So this year, I'm challenging you: don't try to do life alone. **Lean into community**. Join a ministry team or a small group. Show up to the special events we plan. Be vulnerable enough to ask for help. Be brave enough to offer it. Your story matters. Your presence matters. Your struggle matters. And *together*, we are much stronger than we could ever be *apart*.

☞ As we look ahead to 2026, I want you to ponder a question... **Who will you become?** INSTE talks about the importance of "becoming" over "doing." "Doing" flows from "becoming." Life isn't ultimately about what we do—it's about who we are. It's about allowing God to shape our ☞ character and strengthen our faith. It's about becoming **more like Christ, day by day, choice by choice, moment by moment**.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." That's the person you're becoming. That's the transformation God is working in you. Success in God's economy isn't measured by what we accumulate but by how we love. Significance isn't found in our achievements but in our faithfulness. Legacy isn't built by what we leave behind but by how we lifted others up along the way.

So, as we step into this new year together, here's my prayer for us:

I pray that we would have the courage to embrace new beginnings—to believe that God can do something new in us and through us, even when we've tried and failed before.

I pray that we would have the faith to take the next step—not worry about the whole journey, just the next step. And then the one after that.



I pray that we would have the wisdom to learn from yesterday without being imprisoned by it—that we would let our past inform us without defining us.

And I pray that we would have the love to walk this journey together—encouraging one another, supporting one another, and pointing one another toward the One who makes all things new.

The pages of 2026 are blank, waiting to be written. But remember this: you're not writing this story alone. The Author of life is with you. He's for you. And He has good plans for you. So, let's write a story worth telling this year. Not a story of perfection—nobody wants to read that anyway, it's boring. But a story of faith. Not a story of having it all together, but of trusting the One who holds all things together. Not a story we're proud of because we did it all on our own, but a story we're grateful for because we walked every step with Him.

May this year be marked by grace—grace for yourself when you stumble, grace for others when they do. May it be filled with growth—not the kind that comes from grinding harder, but the kind that comes from abiding deeper in Christ. And may we arrive at its end not merely older, but better—more patient, more kind, more faithful, more like the One who calls us His own.

An old Christmas special features a conversation between two Claymation characters where one says, “it’s so difficult to really change.” The other laughs and replies, “changing from bad to good is as easy as taking your first step.” And then the song goes... “Put one foot in front of the other, And soon you’ll be walking ‘cross the floor, You put one foot in front of the other, And soon you’ll be walking out the door.”

And that's actually the secret. **It's not about the big dramatic moments.** It's about showing up on the ordinary Sundays. **It's about faithfulness when no one's watching. It's about obedience in the small things.** So, whether this year brings triumph or trial, breakthrough or heartbreak—we're going to walk through it together. With God. With each other.

☞ **A Fresh Start begins with one step at a time.** So, what's your next step?