



FRESH START

You are beginning life's most satisfying adventure – your walk with God! As you start this adventure, here's what God says to you:

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be —you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean. Psalm 32:11 (MSG)

When you make a commitment of your life to Jesus, not only is your "slate wiped clean", you also get a "fresh start" – a new lease on life. This class is designed to help you have a good start to your fresh start. During these weeks together you'll discover and begin to unwrap ten gifts that God gives you:

- F**ORGIVENESS – Accepting God's Grace
- R**ELATIONSHIP – Worshipping
- E**NCOURAGEMENT – Handling Failure
- S**CRPTURE – Understanding God's Word
- H**ELP – Following God's Guidance

- S**HAPE – Being You
- T**OGETHERNESS – Living in Community
- A**UTHORITY – Serving Others
- R**ECOGNITION – Being Baptized
- T**ESTIMONY – Telling Your Story

This session: ENCOURAGEMENT – Handling Failure

...God...gives endurance and encouragement.... Romans 15:5 (NIV)

That's good news because temptation comes to all of us. But I think temptation is especially troublesome to a new believer trying to live this new life following Jesus.

How do I respond to temptations?

- 1. Remind myself that I am not doing life alone.**

I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished. Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

I can do all things through (Christ) who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (NASB)

2. Realize that Jesus has defeated my enemy.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3:8 (NIV)

3. Ask myself, "What would Jesus do in this situation?"

Let the Lord Jesus Christ take control of you, and don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires. Romans 13:14 (NLT)

4. Choose God's way.

God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)

There is always, always a way out. Jesus was tempted, but He didn't sin. There will be times that you choose God's way, but there will also be times when you don't. And when you and I don't choose God's way, we fail.

What do I do when I fail?

Notice, this question has an assumption? What is that assumption?

The assumption: All of us fail.

Well, we all make mistakes. We all fail – and in fact there've probably been times when we felt like Charlie Brown who said, "Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, "Where have I gone wrong?" Then a voice says, "This is going to take more than one night."

The apostle Paul said,

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. Romans 7:15 (NIV)

There is no one on earth who does what is right all the time and never makes a mistake. Ecclesiastes 7:20 (TEV)

When we make those mistakes, God does not want us to give up and quit trying to live like Christ. That's our natural tendency. But God has another idea. Look at this verse.

God gives a hand to those down on their luck, gives a fresh start to those ready to quit. Psalm 145:14 (MSG)

1. Admit I have failed

We all stumble in many ways. James 3:2 (NIV)

Do you agree that **we all** stumble, fail, in all kinds of ways? How many of us are living proof? Let's do a reality check right here. Look at the person beside you and say, "I have failed." That might have been a little tough for you. Now, let's do something a little easier. Look at the person beside you again, and this time say, "You have failed" Don't list any reasons, just make the statement.

For everybody has sinned and everybody continues to come short of God's glory. Romans 3:23 (Wms)

That's why we need Jesus. If it were possible for us to live life on our own, Jesus would not have needed to come and we wouldn't need Him every day.

2. Assess why I failed

It is the thought-life that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you. Mark 7:20-23 (NLT)

All sin begins in the thought-life. It never just happens. Let's list examples of sin that begin with thoughts (adultery, drunkenness, theft, lying, etc.)

3. Ask God for forgiveness

If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. 1 John 1:9 (NLT)

Did you hear that? Thoroughly clean, completely forgiven – doesn't that sound great? No guilt – forgiven – with a clear conscience, knowing that you're alright with God.

Think with me on this. Is it possible to be partially clean? No, if there's any dirt left, then the car or person is dirty. Clean or dirty – there's no middle ground. God says when we confess our sin, He forgives us and we're clean. None of the dirt is left on us!

God made my life complete when I placed all the pieces before Him. When I got my act together, He gave me a fresh start. Psalm 18:20 (MSG)

When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long. Day and night Your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord. And You forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Psalm 32:3-5 (NLT)

4. Access my future

Do not cling to the events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I'm going to do. Isaiah 43:18-19 (TEV)

He's saying, "Let's focus on the future. Don't keep focusing on all that stuff that happened in the past. Watch for the new thing."

Why did God put our eyes in the front? So that we would look forward, He doesn't want us looking back. Our ears are turned to the front because what's ahead of us is what really matters. It's easier to reach to the front than to the back. God intends for us to reach forward. There's only one part of our body that is "behind" us, and we don't need to be looking there.

So many people live looking at their past instead of their future. They live with a voice in their head that says, "I blew it. I really made a mistake and I'm going to have to live with it the rest of my life." They've doomed themselves. They live under a burden, locked in the prison of a self-imposed sentence that they must be unhappy the rest of their lives because they made a mistake.

The truth is, God loves to give people a second chance. It's His nature – His grace.

People say, "But you can't unscramble eggs." Right. But you can make an omelet. Make the best of a tough situation.

God wants to make the rest of your life the best of your life!

He is saying, "It's not so much where you've been that counts, but it's the direction of your feet, where they're headed." That's what counts.

5. Adjust my course

For years, the opening of The Wide World of Sports television program showed "the agony of defeat" a painful ending to an attempted ski jump. The skier appeared in good form as he headed down the jump, but then, for no apparent reason, he tumbled end over end off the side of the jump, bouncing off the supporting structure.

What viewers didn't know, was that he chose to fall rather than finish the jump. Why? As he explained later, the jump surface had become too fast, and midway down, he realized if he completed the jump, he would land on the level ground, beyond the safe landing area, which could have been fatal to him and others. As it was, the skier suffered no more than a headache from the tumble.

To adjust your course may not be easy, it might even cause you some pain, but change is always better than a fatal landing at the end.

Go now and leave your life of sin. John 8:11 (NIV)

Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways. Proverbs 20:30 (TEV)

To change the way I live, I must change the way I see myself

Because of Jesus, I have:

- **A new position**

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17a (NIV)

That new position – new identity in Christ is mentioned more than 150 times in the New Testament. Perhaps because it is a radically new position for us when we find it.

Here's how it's radically new:

When you are **not** in Christ, you are guilty of every sin you've ever committed.

When you are in Christ, you are forgiven of every sin you'll ever commit.

When you are **not** in Christ, you are lost.

When you are in Christ, you are found.

When you are **not** in Christ you'll be given justice.

When you are in Christ, you're given mercy.

When you are **not** in Christ, you may find moments of happiness.

When you are in Christ, you can find a lifetime of joy.

When you are **not** in Christ, you want peace.
When you are in Christ, you have peace.

When you are **not** in Christ, your eternity is hell.
When you are in Christ, your eternity is heaven.

Doesn't that new position in Christ sound like a great deal? If you've prayed and asked Jesus into your life, that's the deal you were given. Many of you face every day, the scramble for position—always positioning yourselves for a better opportunity, a better buy, a better promotion. Why? Because you understand that your position is essential for your future. And that's never been more true than your position, either not in Christ or in Christ. And here's the good news, you don't have to scramble for position, because God came looking for you to give you that new position.

- **A new possession**

... the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17b (NIV)

Everything new—that's the work of Jesus. New...that seems to be a word God likes. One of our greatest, maybe even our greatest possession is who we are, our identity. And, if we were perfectly honest, some of us need a new one.

We may feel somewhat like the prosecuting attorney who was questioning a lady on the witness stand. He said, "Do you know me?" She answered, "Of course I know you. I've known you since you were a little boy. I've watched you grow up. You are a scoundrel, a heavy drinker, and a womanizer." The prosecuting attorney said, "Do you know the attorney for the defendant?" She answered, "I sure do. I used to baby-sit for him. I changed his diapers, I fed him his bottles. And he's grown up to be a man who is about as low as they come, he'll defend anything." With that the judge called both attorneys to the bench for a little side bar. He leaned forward, looked at the two attorneys and said, "If either of you asks this woman if she knows me, I'll hold you in contempt."

Some of us need an old identity to go and a new one to come. Wouldn't you like everything to be made new in you, a new identity, a fresh start? You have one if you've made a commitment to Jesus.

- **New potential**

I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

Your future is better, brighter, and bigger than anything in your past for this one reason, Christ lives in you. That's Potential.

When Victor Seribriakoff was fifteen his teacher told him he would never finish school and that he should drop out and learn a trade. Victor took the advice and for the next seventeen years he was an itinerant doing a variety of odd jobs. He had been told he was a "dunce" and for seventeen years he acted like one. When he was 32 years old, an amazing transformation took place. An evaluation revealed that he was a genius with an I.Q. of 161. Guess what? That's right, he started acting like a genius.

Since that time, he has written books, secured a number of patents and has become a successful businessman. Perhaps the most significant event for the former dropout was his election as chairman of the International Mensa Society. The Mensa Society has only one membership qualification - an I.Q. of 140. What was it that made the difference in Victor's life? Did he all of a sudden get smart at age 32? No. What changed was the way he saw himself.

There's probably no single factor that is more important in determining how we live, than how we see ourselves, what we understand our identity to be.

I heard of a hair salon called "Identity." Can you imagine the depth of the emptiness that must exist in folks whose personal identity depends on their hair? Sure, our hair is important, but "Identity?"

Let me ask you a question: On what are you basing your identity? For a whole lot of people, there have been events that have scarred their identity. Perhaps it was abuse as a child, a business failure, not making the team, a marriage that failed, a moment of indiscretion, a sinful act. The scars are there and they are real. Good news! When you are "in Christ," when you have given your life to Him, He gives you a new identity, and the past is gone. You've got potential. Jesus now lives in you!

In our next session:

SCRIPTURE

– Understanding God's Word

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