

HOW TO MAKE A FRESH START PART 3

Preparing for the New Year

Isaiah 43:18-19 (NCV)

Review: S. T. A

R – Refocus

In preparing for the New Year 2009, for you to make a fresh start you need to refocus **your thoughts** if you want to change your life. If I want to get going again, if I want a fresh start in those areas of my life, I need to rethink the way that I think. I need to change my mind about a number of issues in my life. I need to be honest with myself and rethink some of the issues in my life. See God's Word, the bible says, *"Be careful how you think. Your life is shaped by your thoughts."* Prv. 4:23. **The way you think, determines the way you feel**

and the way you feel determines the way you act.

God's Word is telling us here this morning if you want to change your actions, you don't just bunch up all **your willpower** and try to change. That's not what this scripture is saying at all. It says, if you want to change your actions, start changing the way you think and it will inevitably change the way you act. *"Be careful how you think. Your life is shaped by your thoughts."* If you are acting in a dejected, depressed, discouraged and defeated way, it's because you're thinking dejected depressed, discouraged and defeated thoughts.

I want to speak the truth in love to you today from God's Word.../ it says, "you're choosing to do that... You've made that choice.../ If you're acting in fearful, worried ways it's because you're thinking fearful worried

thoughts.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I've got to stop feeling this way: They say like you can change your feelings, like you can't force a feeling to change just by saying, I've got to stop feeling this way." For example: It's like saying, "I'm going to force myself to feel loving towards you or saying and believing that would be like spanking your child and then saying, "Now, I want you to be happy." They can't force that feeling.

WHY? Because you first have to change your thoughts, then that changes your actions and then that changes your feelings. If refocusing my thoughts is part of the process to a fresh start, then that means I have to stop thinking some of my old patterns.

Let me ask you a question? Which memories of

'08 maybe are you still rehearsing in this new year of '09? The Bible says let go of them. We all have things we regret that have happened in our life in 08, there are things you're ashamed of in your life. There are mistakes, failures, bad, dumb decisions you made, we've all made them. But, every time you think them over and over again in your mind, you're just reinforcing them in your mind. God's Word says to you, your past is past! It's over, it's done. It's never going to be with you again. The book is closed, the door is shut. The past cannot hurt you any more unless you choose to let it hurt you by holding on to the memory of it. Think about what I just said, Think about it! "The more you hold on to that memory, the more you rehearse it, it continues to hurt you today and that has no value for you. 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.

Here's the starting place. Everything starts this way with God: (REPEAT) First, there is always confession. You just right now simply just take a moment and ask God to forgive you of your part in this: ---- Now you maybe sitting there and saying, Bill, I have confessed to God but, I still feel guilty. How do I get rid of a painful memory?"

Well let me say this to you: (PAUSE) This I do know for sure it doesn't happen by resisting it.../ it happens by replacing it. It doesn't happen by just saying, "I'm not going to think about it! I'm not going to think about it! I'm not going to think about it! I'm not

going to think about it! I'm not going to think about it!"

What are you doing the whole time your saying, "I'm not going to think about it!" – What are you doing ... "Your thinking about it."

We have to stop focusing on what you don't want and start focusing on what you do want. Do you see the faith needed in God in doing it that way.../ to stop focusing on what you don't want and start focusing on what you do want? Do you see the faith needed in that?

You get your attention onto something else. You refocus. You replace those memories; those thoughts every time they come up, you start thinking about something else. You don't allow them to take you captive: You focus on something else.

Now the question should be coming up? "What do you

refocus on?" We'll you need truth here: You need something that you can count on and stand on day in and day out.../ Something that doesn't change or waver. What's the best thing to focus on? God's word, The Bible. Why? Because it is truth. It's the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.../ Listen to what God's Word says to you, *"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."* Psalm 1 Circle "happy" and "succeed". Those are the two things that everybody wants in the New Year 2009. We all want to be happy and we all want to succeed in this New Year of 2009. The antidote, the remedy is the phrase right in the middle of that scripture -- *"... meditating on God's word."* Circle "meditating".

The more you meditate on God's word, the more happy and successful you'll be! (PAUSE) That's not a maybe here gang.../ that's a promise to you from God, the more you meditate on My word, God says, the more happy and successful you'll be!

What does it mean to meditate? Meditation is so important in this process. Let me first say this that meditation is nothing mystical or scary or super spiritual. If you look up the word meditate in a dictionary, it simply means *"to focus, to concentrate, to think about something over and over in your mind."* Most people know how to think about something over and over in our mind because that's the action you use when you worry, you take a fear or a negative idea and think on it over and over in your mind and we call that worry.

Meditation is when we take a verse from God's Word, the Bible and we focus on it we concentrate, we think on it over and over, we call that meditating.

It's interesting that the Bible does not say, If you read this book, you'll be happy and successful. It does say that, It doesn't say, If you listen to this book, you'll be happy and successful. If you want to be happy and success you need to meditate on Me and my word, that's what God's Word is telling you... if you want to be happy and if you want to be successful you need to what, **meditate on Me on My word.** It says "If you meditate on it you'll be happy and successful."

Meditating simply means I think on it over and over and over what it means in my life. I grapple with it over and over, I consider it and I consider the implications it has

for my life.

And why God's Word, why not some good Christian author. Why God's word... because meditating on God's word, is what begins to change your mind. You begin to stop seeing yourself as other people see you or as you have seen yourself and you begin to see yourself as God sees you... You see yourself as a person that He created with a purpose, a good and fulfilling purpose for your life. That's where the change takes place. That's the power to start over in God's Word.

When I read my Bible, I find stories of people who were murderers, adulterers, liars and cheats and total failures and they did all kinds of despicable things. And Jesus Christ gave every one of them a fresh start.

If there's anything I want to say to you, it's this:

Regardless of the failures you've had in your life in 2008 or earlier, there is **hope**. It is never too late to start over.

Remember what we said earlier in this series.

You are never a failure until you give up, until you quit trying, until you give up reaching. Jesus Christ says you matter to Him and He can make the rest of your life the best of your life... if you will give Him the pieces of your broken life and if you will He will give you in exchange His peace for your broken pieces.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Jonah 3:1. You may know the story of Jonah and the whale. God told Jonah to go one direction and do something and Jonah decided he'd do the exact opposite of what God wanted for his life. So God had to take him on a little Mediterranean cruise in the belly of a whale. After

that cruise was over in Jonah 3:1 it says "*And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time.*" -- *a second time*" I don't know how well you know God.

But, I'm so glad for that verse that we serve the God of the second chance and of the third, the fourth, the fifth and the tenth, and the 25th and the 100th chance. He is the God of grace who says, "Come to Me with your brokenness, come to Me with your failures, come to Me with your shame, come to Me with your guilt, come to Me with the messed up things you're doing in your life and I can turn them around. WHY? Because God says, I love you and I made you for a purpose.

(PAUSE) Now that brings me to the fifth step. The fifth and last letter of the series.

T – Trust Trust God to help me succeed. Depend on

Him for my success. Don't depend on yourself. You've already proven you can't do it on your own. That's why you'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 think to yourself I'll try it again but harder and Bang! Again. Bang! And again Bang! You keep doing it thinking, "Maybe it will fall over this time."

Do you know what the definition of insanity is – doing the same over and over and over and expecting different results. Some of you are trying to run a 100-yard race in a 90-yard building. You built the building and you keep banging up against the wall thinking, "Why doesn't this change?" Why can't I finish, because

you can't change on your own. So some people just don't get it. When they stumble and fail, they just say to themselves, I'll try harder I'll make some new resolutions. Friends will power won't do it here.

God's word, the Bible says, "*You will not succeed by your own strength or power but by My Spirit, says the Lord.*" Zechariah 4:6 The secret of success is not by your strength but by trusting in God and His ways in starting over. Would you like to wipe the slate clean? Have you ever thought "I'd like to redesign my life from the ground up"? God word tells us, "*When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!*" 2 Corinthians 5:17 (LB) God specializes in new beginnings. Jesus Christ has the power to do that.

It's called being born again. It doesn't mean reincarnation. It just means the chance to start over. A fresh start. God says, "I don't want you to turn over a new leaf in life. I'm going to give you a whole new life." I had a guy tell me one time, "When I look at my life it just all adds up to one big zero! One big negative!" How does God turn a zero into a plus? How does He turn a negative into a positive? He takes the minuses in your life and turns them into a positive by making a cross.

Jesus Christ was hung up for your hang-ups. He died on the cross for everything you feel bad about. He was crucified between two thieves so you could stop crucifying yourself over those past failures. That's called grace. You say, "But I wasted so many years." But listen to what God's Word says, "*I will restore the*

years the locusts have eaten." Joel 1:4 In the Book of Isaiah it says, "*I will give you beauty for ashes.*" Are you ready to trust Him today? Are you ready for a New Beginning? Are you ready to make a fresh new start in this New Year of 2009?

This year, 2009, let's together as a church family and as individuals... ask Christ to help us make a fresh start.

Let us pray: Pray this prayer: "Dear God, only You can fully know me and the hurt in my heart. You've seen me stumble. You've watched me fall. You've watched me fail. You know the areas of my life that I'm ashamed of. You know where I've hurt others even when I didn't know I was doing it. Father, You also know how I've been hurt by other people. Today, as I begin the New Year I ask You to give me a fresh start. First I accept

responsibility for my part of the problems in my life. I'm going to stop making excuses. Forgive me for not listening to You. Forgive me for thinking that I knew better. Help me to take stock of the good that You've brought into my life. Help me to learn from my experiences. Today I want to act in faith. In this simple prayer, I open up my life to You. I ask You, Jesus Christ, to be my savior. I ask You to forgive me and to guide me from here on out. I want and need your wisdom and direction for my life. Help me to focus on You and Your word. I want to trust You to give me the power to start over and to do the right thing from here on. Come into my life and be in charge. In Your name, I pray. Amen.”