

Beginning Anew

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Introduction

"I'd sure like to start over."

"I wish I knew then what I know now."



We have said, or at least felt, that way numerous times. We would like a new beginning. In our relationship with God, we would like to start again. Deep within our hearts we want to be Christians-to live close to God. At times we push away the idea, but the desire to live differently surfaces. We may stifle our longing for God by a show of independence, redoubled activity, a constant round of pleasure, but to no avail. Our hearts inform us: We want God in our lives. We are inclined to think we can handle life and living on our own. Perhaps we have laughed at the idea of becoming a Christian-put it from our minds-but never completely. If remembering were our job alone, we might forget. But God continues to invite us to become His-to begin a new relationship with Him. His approach is appealing. When we think about starting a new relationship with God, questions arise. Questions that need answers.

Chapter 1

Why Should I Start a Relationship with God?

1. My Sin Reveals I Need God

Sin separates us from God. As children when we disobeyed our parents, we experienced their disapproval. We felt distance between them and us. We knew the wrong act had grieved them. Oh, the loneliness of those moments! The awareness of our sins interrupts the warm, close relationship with our Father. Separation may not jut from the surface of our consciousness, but below lies the knowledge that all is not right. Sin enslaves us. We find it so easy to do wrong. We don't want to sin. But we

Before long, sin does not seem to be wrong. What would have shocked us becomes acceptable.

sin. We go directly against what we know to be right. Once we have sinned, the next time we put up less of a fight. We justify the second sin because of the first sin. Before long, sin does not seem to be wrong. What would have shocked us becomes acceptable. We have become slaves to sin. God asks this personal question: "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

Sin brings spiritual death. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, KJV). We may isolate our sins from their consequences. But the result of sin is set. Death. We possess no life with God-now or later. We may respect God. We may desire a friendship with Him. But if we continue in sin, we are not saved. We are strangers to God's love because we don't enjoy His forgiveness. We don't understand His ways because His presence does not live in our hearts.

We may note our sin, long to live right, and expect to be saved someday; but now sin rules our lives. We are lost. Heaven, with all its glory and splendor, may be desirable, but if we are unsaved, we cannot enter heaven. We are spiritually dead.

2. Conscience Tells Me to Get Right with God

Conscience, the watchman of the soul, pleads: "You should start anew with God." Conscience reacts to sin. Conscience says, "You need to make that right. You should not do that. You will pay. Look at your past." 10 The Psalmist, a godly man, describes his conscience at work: "For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head,

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and my heart fails within me" (Ps. 40:12). *Guilt follows our wrong deeds.* We repress the guilt. We justify the wrong in order to make the sin tolerable. We look at the circumstances for evidence as to why we could not help sinning. Guilt can be kept down only so long. The inner

condemner rises to announce the regrettable verdict: Guilty! Busyness pushes the guilt to the back of the shelf. In the quiet moments conscience awakens. Guilt convicts again. The process of repressing guilt may seem successful. Then we realize that *guilt can disguise itself in anger*. Anger turned inward becomes bitterness. The bitterness within edges its way out through our tempers. We act resentful. Unprovoked we may strike out. We wonder why. Guilt has spoken once more. God has given us the gift of guilt. He really wants us to listen to this inner voice of conscience. God calls to us through guilt's voice. He says, "Let Me give you a new beginning. We have been separated too long. Stop sinning. Become Mine."

3. A Relationship with God Is Highly Desirable

If a person is unsure about starting a relationship with God, *often the obstacle to the new beginning* is created by a misunderstanding of God. A student at a state college heard a pastor lecture on the Bible in a humanities class. After the lecture, the student followed the minister outside. The skeptical student expressed doubts about God. The pastor listened to the student and then made this observation: "The God you describe is not the loving caring, and forgiving God of the Bible. Jesus, who knew God best,

described Him as a loving Father." One adult woman admitted, "My dad wasn't a very good father to me. But I sure know God's an excellent Father. He is the One I always wished I had.

When we come to God with our sins and the ugly marks they have left upon us, God accepts us. He cleans up our lives. He takes us into His family. God forgives. He mends broken lives. Sin brings sorrow, but God fills us with joy. *We were made for this kind of relationship with God.* Our lungs were made for air, our eyes for sight, our lips to speak. Our souls were made for God. We discover life's greatest possibilities with God as our Father. Our feet were not created to walk the paths of sin, but the paths of righteousness. Our minds were not made to be filled with the cheap, sensual, and negative thoughts, but to think the thoughts of God. Thinking as God thinks will bring a new and beautiful dimension to living. Whereas wrong emotions such as jealousy, hatred, strife, lust, anger, and selfish ambition characterize our thoughts, *God teaches us to think new thoughts.* God plants within us the seeds of love, joy peace, patience, goodness, and self-control. We are able to think about the true, the noble, the right, the pure, the lovely. Admirable thoughts become typical thoughts when God gives us a new beginning.

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Regrettably some people would forfeit such a relationship with God. To them the concerns of this life seem more pressing than a relationship with God. The self-interests, the need to control, the desire for recognition are more real than God is. Jesus asks a priority question: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

4. Jesus Provides for a New Start

Jesus Christ's death on the Cross made salvation possible. Jesus informed us in His own words: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). *Jesus took our sins upon himself.* He died so that we could be spared the consequences of our wrongdoing. The resurrection of Christ from the dead gives hope for a new beginning. God gave life to Jesus. He gives life to us. We are resurrected from death due to our sins and provided with a new life in Christ.

Even if we are "good," Jesus' death and resurrection are necessary to bring us new life. If we are horrible sinners, Jesus still pardons. A lady spoke with her pastor about wanting to accept Christ into her heart.

"I wish Jesus could forgive my sins."

Her pastor said, "Be assured. Jesus will forgive you."

"But you don't know what awful sins I've committed," she said. "I've had a live-in boyfriend. I know that's wrong. And I've sinned before that, too."

The pastor read to her John 8:1-11 about the adulterous woman to whom Jesus said, "Then neither do I condemn you. . . .Go now and leave your life of sin."

"I never knew that story was in the Bible," responded the seeking lady. "I guess God can forgive my sins."

The Cross and the Resurrection prove God's love for sinners. Jesus cared for us so much that He died so we could start anew.

Chapter 2

How Can I Start a New Relationship with God?

The conditions we meet in order to start afresh with God are only two:

1. Repent

Jesus spoke about repentance. He set up repentance as a necessary step in getting right with God. Jesus used the word *repentance* to mean a thoroughgoing change of attitude toward sin. Some have misunderstood repentance. Repentance is more than *being emotionally moved*. People have reported spiritual experiences as impressive and moving events. Unfortunately these experiences did not produce behavioral changes. Life trudged on unchanged. Repentance is *not being afraid*. Wicked King Ahab, scared by Elijah's prediction of his tragic death, changed temporarily. Fear produced change, but only for a short time.

Repentance is *more than reform*. People, by themselves and without God's help, overcome obstacles to live a different way. But reform does not pass for genuine repentance. Reform is superficial. Repentance is divinely inspired, implemented, and reaches to our inner being. Sorrow should not be mistaken for repentance. *Remorse may counterfeit repentance*. Regret can easily substitute for repentance. For example, Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver after betraying Jesus. With remorse and regret Judas then hanged himself.

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Repentance leads a person to Jesus. Repentance brings on life-new life, real life. *Repentance is a turning point*. Instead of following sin to spiritual death, we change directions and head toward the Savior. Jesus gives new life. He makes us into new persons. We become someone else-new creations.

Repentance is a deep, complete change. We stop sinning. Deliberate, intentional, and continual sin is forsaken. We let go of self-rule. We permit God to become God of our lives. Jesus spoke this principle: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent . . ." (Mark 1:15). When we repent God becomes King of our lives. Repenting gives Him the right of Lordship. Because God's kingship is near, that is, available, we are instructed and urged to repent.

2. Trust Christ Alone

Faith is absolutely essential to salvation. "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Just as repentance is misunderstood, so is faith. *Faith is more than an intellectual understanding about God*. Faith exceeds even a mental concept that God exists. The scripture just quoted says, "Anyone who comes to him must believe . . . that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Faith believes in a "rewarding" God. God always responds to a seeking person. God explains why He forgives, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isa. 43:2 5). God wants to remove our sins. *We are to trust Him to do what He says*.

Rose, crippled with arthritis until her feet and hands were gnarled and distorted, claimed God had not forgiven her.

"Have you asked God to forgive you?" inquired her friend.

"Oh yes. Every day of my life I have asked God. But I don't feel He has forgiven me."

"Why do you maintain God has not forgiven you?"

"Because He is punishing me with this arthritis."

"God is not punishing you. But you are convinced. Why?"

"When my husband died I shook my fist at God and said, 'A loving God could never do that.' I was sorry I ever said that. I've asked God to forgive me. But He hasn't."

God had forgiven her, but she never believed Him until that day. Her friend read 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Rose's friend asked, "Why do you suppose the scripture says God forgives because of God's faithfulness and justice?"

Rose did not know.

Her friend explained, "Jesus died to save us from our sins. God would be unfaithful to himself and unfair to Jesus if He did not forgive the person who admitted his need for salvation. The reason for God's forgiveness is Jesus." Rose believed God for a new start. The first time in 40 years!

Chapter 3

Starting Anew with God-What Does It Mean?

Four wonderful things happen when we repent and trust Christ to save us: *First, guilt is removed.* Our sinning makes us guilty Christ's death and resurrection erases our past. God provides a complete pardon for us. We may never be found guilty for the sins of our past. We go free. In the eyes of God we are as free of guilt as though we had never sinned.

After President Gerald Ford offered a pardon to former President Richard Nixon, the press asked Ford if Richard Nixon was admitting his guilt by accepting the pardon. President Ford replied, "Yes, he is." We admit our need for forgiveness. Also just as Nixon has never been tried for the crimes of Watergate, so God's pardon is complete.

Justified in God's sight we no longer are condemned. The feelings of guilt have no basis. God says, "Not guilty" Now we begin anew. *Second, we are cleansed.*

God scrubs our hearts clean. The old motives are purified. We no longer strive to live life under the commands of lower priorities. God is first in our hearts-our love. We may be tempted, but sin does not have the power that formerly pulled us into its clutches. Through obedience our hearts express love for God. Cleansing removes the corrosion surrounding the image of God that is present in us. Each of us was made in God's image-His likeness resides in us. Unfortunately our sin stains and corrodes God's

image so that it is not clearly evident in the sinner. When God purifies us He scrapes away the accretions. Now God's characteristics shine through. Love, joy peace, patience, goodness, and self-control begin to shine through. God has cleansed our hearts.

Third, we are adopted into God's family.

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). God wants us in His family Romans 8:15 states this fact: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship."

God looks at us-the person He forgives and cleanses-and He says, "I want you to be My child, live in My love, eat at My table." God wants you to be His family member. Think of this: Christ becomes your brother. What a privilege! What a relationship! As family we may come to our Father for help and comfort in the time of need.

Fourth, new life begins.

When we repent and trust Christ, we are born again. God gives us a new start. We are made new. We are re-created. Spiritual life is planted in us. Once being dead in our sins we now have life-real life.

When we accept Jesus into our lives, we possess life-the new beginning. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

All that we hoped for in a new start begins now. The chance to be at ease with God. The longed-for opportunity to quiet the voice of guilt. The possibility to reach the potential trapped within. New life. A new start.

Chapter 4

When Should I Start My Relationship with God?

1. While You Have Time

This truth is not to be misinterpreted as pressure. It is fact. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow may never come. Now is the only moment we have for sure. "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Now is the time because God's claim on you is constant. Since it is right to become a Christian, it is wrong to delay. Since it is wrong to delay there is no reason why you should not be saved now. Satan tempts you to postpone. Salvation is a matter of priority. Since it is right to be a Christian, then nothing should hinder you from giving your heart to God. Family friends, job, pleasure, position-nothing should prevent you from obeying God. All of life fits into the pattern of proper relationship when Jesus is Lord of your life. God promises us, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33).

Every moment of postponement adds to the accumulation of sin. Postponing wastes more time. More of your influence will be misdirected. Additional guilt will be heaped on the load you already carry Delay, even for a few hours, may divert your attention from this present, important consideration. Days, months, even years may pass before you reconsider.



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People sometimes wish their lives were cleaned up and their problems solved first before being saved. They will never be saved, for problems are always present.



Several years ago a young couple refused an invitation to pray to start anew with God. They promised they would seek the Lord at church. But they skipped the church service. Other events stole their attention. Today they are still unsaved. Could it be that the moment in which they so nearly gave their hearts to God was the nearest they will ever come to being saved? Apparent reasons will always be handy as to why it seems better to wait. Satan suggests these excuses: "I am not ready yet." "I want to think it over a little longer." "I don't understand many things." The only preparation you need is the determination to seek God. You don't need to think it over any longer; indecision is the enemy of your soul. A 50-year-old man, upon hearing how he could begin a relationship with Christ said, "I want to think it over a little longer." He needed God more than he needed to think.

People sometimes wish their lives were cleaned up and their problems solved first before being saved. They will never be saved, for problems are always present. Furthermore, they may feel they have no need for God. God cleans up our lives. While He does not solve all problems, He dissolves many. Accept God into your heart now. He will take care of the other considerations.

2. While You Still Have the Opportunity

Sin's grasp gets tighter and stronger. Years of rejecting God deepen the groove of habitual resistance. It is hard to jump out of an old rut. People tend to die as they lived-with or without God. Sin gets a chokehold on us. Sin is more than wrong actions; it is a way of life. Sin is disobedience and rebellion against God. Sin is rooted deep in our nature, making a new start is not easy. It never becomes easier to make a decision for Christ. Life keeps pulling us down. Responsibility mounts upon us. Life becomes complex. Difficult decisions never are easier to make merely with the addition of time. Decide now while you have the will to do so. Terry laughed.

"I know God will forgive me anytime I ask. I plan to go to heaven, but I'm going to wait until the last 30 seconds of my life before I repent."

I started to speak, but he interrupted, anticipating what I might say, "I'll just take my chances on being conscious the last few moments of my life."

"Terry," I said, "You recognize the risk you are taking. But I have worse news for you: unfortunately God will not forgive you in the last 30 seconds of your life, even if you asked."

"What! He has to. He promised He would."

"God promised He would forgive if you repent."

"I could repent. Don't think I couldn't! If I knew I were 30 seconds from hell . . . "

"But, Terry the first and greatest commandment is to love God. Repentance means to change your focus of love. You are trying to beat God with His own rules. I don't see how you love Him. You may be asking for forgiveness, but you are not changing your mind about God. You refuse to love Him."

Two weeks later Terry phoned. "I accepted Christ into my heart today. I wanted you to know. God wouldn't quit dealing with me."

3. While God Calls

Terry experienced God tugging at his heart-calling him to himself. He almost begs you in this scripture: "Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?'" (Ezek. 33:11).

God pleads gently "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

Our loving Father appeals to you. Come to Him. His call for you is clear and persuasive. Begin anew. Be saved while God calls.

Will you seek a place of prayer right now?

Will you give Him your heart?
Repent of your sins.
Confess your guilt.
Accept His pardon.
Give Him your life.

Don't delay until hope trickles away.

Pray today, for He will save you.
He will make you new.
You can start fresh.

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