



TIME OF GRACE®

A Fresh Start: With Jesus

Study Notes

Summary

Most people don't equate repentance with the words *fresh* or *liberating*. Crying, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" seems like a miserable way to start the year. But not according to Jesus. Jesus said that those who humbly confess their need of God's grace (instead of self-righteously comparing themselves to others) will be justified and exalted in the eyes of God. Perhaps, then, repentance is the most liberating way to live!

- **2 Peter 1:5-8:** ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- God wants you to _____.
- **2 Peter 1:3,4:** ³His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
- God wants to keep you _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Do you regularly make resolutions or set goals? If so, how do you do it? If not, why not? Finally, how did today's message make you rethink the idea of spiritual growth?
2. Agree/Disagree: Without the refreshing power of God's promises to forgive you and be with you, your spiritual resolutions will eventually be a burden and not a joy.

3. Read Philippians 3:12-17. How did the apostle Paul view personal growth? How did his connection to the gospel (check out Philippians 3:7-11 for the context) help inspire him to press on in his pursuit of God?

Homework for Next Week

Read Genesis 1:26-2:2.

*"If you're going in the wrong direction, turning around is the only right direction."
—Woodrow Kroll*

Time of Grace Ministry
A Fresh Start: With Jesus
2 Peter 1:3-9
January 5, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Well, if you've paid attention to the calendar, you know that today is a day and this week is a week of fresh starts. When you flip the calendar and those blank days are before us and we just think culturally that January is a time when we think about the future.

And so during this month in America, tens of millions of us - our coworkers, our neighbors, our family members and friends - we're going to buy gym memberships and we're going to promise ourselves to eat healthier and we're going to try to not stop at the Taco Bell drive through twice a week or maybe that's just my resolution for the new year. We're promising God and ourselves that this year is going to be different.

I'm just curious - how many of you have ever made a New Year's resolution before? At least one in your life? Yeah, almost every hand up. How many of you are honestly planning on setting a goal or making your resolution this year? About 20 percent of you; that's interesting. Here's my challenging question for you today - if you're a follower of Jesus, should you? Should every single Christian make a resolution to make the future better than the past? To have personal goals for our faith and our finances, the bodies that God has given us, our emotional thought life, our relationships? And the Bible's simple answer to that question is yes. In fact, there's a fancy theological word for this; we call it "sanctification." Have you ever heard of that before? It's where in response to God's crazy love for us and his presence in our hearts and lives, we try to act more and more like saints and less and less like sinners. I mean, if you realize as a follower of Jesus that you're not perfect yet, that you have room to grow in your love for God and the people he's put in your life, it's pretty logical - of course we'd want to grow! Of course you won't repeat the sins of the past. Of course we'd want to honor God in every way in the future.

But I bet you know something about that kind of growth because rumor has it that resolutions have a reputation. Do you know why lots of people don't get that jacked up at the start of the year and make tons of New Year's resolutions to be better and different and to change? It's because, generally, can you finish this sentence? "New Year's resolutions fail." They end. They train wreck. And it's not even like running a marathon, you know, where you kind of collapse at mile 20 in a very long race. When does the average New Year's resolution fail? January 3rd? Tenth? February 1st? Yeah, a study done by the University of Bristol said that 88 percent of American resolutions will be done and dead by the time we flip the calendar to February. And so, experience has kind of taught us maybe not to get our hopes up; maybe not to make some bold promises to God or even to ourselves that this year is going to be that much different.

It makes me think of this pastor that I knew from a few years ago. I was leading this kind of Bible study on personal and spiritual growth with a group of pastors back in Madison. And I'm just wired to love goals; I mean, the flip of the calendar is like the best time of the year for me. I break it down in my notebook with categories, I share it, I download new apps, I love making little boxes and try to check them even though I forget about most of my goals, you know, by January 10th. I love the process but this guy didn't. As I was trying to lead these pastors to set goals to grow in every area of their life, I remember there was this older pastor who you could just see it on his face and I said, "Are you okay?" And he said, "Honestly, Mike, I hate this stuff." I said, "Really? You hate it?" He said, "Every time I do stuff like this, I want to quit being a pastor." You know, his reaction surprised me but then I thought about it and, you know, he's 30 years down the road from me. He's got 30 more years of making promises to God that I'm not going to do that again and I'm going to change and I'm going to be better this year and maybe he's seen just how difficult change is. And so it doesn't inspire him; it depresses him.

And I wonder if many of you aren't in the same boat? I wonder if that's why when I ask you if you've ever made a resolution you all raise your hands and when I ask you this time are you going to make a resolution, almost every hand went down because you know that change sounds great on paper but it's really, really hard in practice. So it kind of begs this question: What are you going to do? I mean, here's a good God who wants you to grow. He wants you to love more and he wants you to sin less. That's over nearly every page of the Bible and, yet, here's this past as you look back that proves that growth is really, really hard and that you maybe set yourself up for disappointment and failure when growth doesn't happen like you promise. What are you going to do? Going to try again? Going to give up? Going to just accept sin as your status quo? You're going to set grand goals for the year to come and just see what happens? Well, can I suggest another option? Because I read something that the apostle Peter wrote in the Bible. If you're kind of new to church, Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends. Jesus had picked these 12 guys - sometimes called the apostles - to kind of live with him and walk with him and learn from his teaching. But there were three of the apostles that were closer than the others to Jesus; two brothers named James and John and the apostle Peter. And so Peter got to soak in like the teaching of Jesus firsthand. He was an eyewitness to the works and the words of Jesus. And after Jesus returned to heaven, God actually moved and inspired Peter to write two letters that you can find in your Bible. They are cleverly named 1 and 2 Peter - alright, so pretty easy to figure that out.

Peter wasn't writing to just like one or two Christians that he knew in his day; he was trying to write letters that would be a blessing to any Christian who would read them and that includes you. And as I unpack just a handful of verses for you today, I want you to notice two big things. I want you to notice Peter's passion for your spiritual growth and then most importantly, how he inspires you to do it. So instead of giving up on our goals, instead of trying to do it by white knuckle willpower, Peter's going to give us something fresh to start this brand new year.

So if you want to follow along on the screen or open your Bible, let's look at 2 Peter 1 starting with verse five. He says, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, mutual affection and to mutual affection, love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

You catch Peter's passion? He says, "Make every effort." He said if you're a follower of Jesus, I don't want you just to sit there; there's no such thing as couch potato Christianity. I want you to work at it. And I love this phrase - he doesn't say, you know, put in a little bit of effort or try your best or do you what you can. No, Peter says "make every effort." Like you want to get over your addiction, you know, how much you spend, how much you drink, how often you look at pornography, then don't just say a prayer and let go and let God. No, make every effort. Like do you have to memorize a Bible passage? Do you have to put filtering software? Do you have to avoid the old places, the old people, the old habits? Whatever you have to do, do it. Do you want your relationships to be better? Then don't cry at night that it's not going well and expect a miracle in the morning. Make every effort. Find out what the Bible has to say about being in a relationship; being a husband or being a wife. Schedule a counseling, read a book, find a couple that you respect whose relationship is really strong and ask them to mentor you. You know, whatever it takes, whatever accountability life hacks, apps, tips, or tricks that you need, make every single effort to make a change. If you want to say to Peter, "Well, Peter, I mean, I'm good, aren't I? I believe in Jesus, I'm going to heaven, I have faith." And Peter says, "No. Just make every effort to add to your faith." God doesn't just want you to sneak in the backdoor of heaven; he wants you to make a real impact in your life here on earth and so he says add goodness and add godliness and add self-control and perseverance and mutual affection and the whole list. And if you respond to Peter, "Well, I already kind of have a bunch of that," then Peter says, "Well then, get a bunch more." He says if you possess these qualities in increasing measure - so if you have a little bit of love, let's increase it. If you have some good self-control and perseverance, let's make it even more. It's like Peter won't let anyone - whether it's your first day in church or 80 years since your baptism - he wants all of us to grow.

If you're taking notes in your program, here's the big word that Peter's trying to put on your heart; that God wants you to "start." You might have to start and take your first step; you might be 10 miles into the marathon we call the Christian life. He wants you to start on the next mile. You might be pretty solid for the past year; he wants you to start growing to make it even better in the year to come. And I love what Peter writes because he doesn't just tell you what to do; he gives you a compelling why. Have you heard that about the studies of what makes New Year's resolutions work? If you just set a goal, you're probably not going to get it. But if you give yourself an inspirational, motivational reason why, you have a better chance to reach it. And so they say if you want to lose weight, you know, get out that picture of what you used to look like 30 pounds ago and you know, stick it on the fridge so before you open it, you have this vision to inspire you. And that's what Peter does in these verses. You notice at the end, he says, "If you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So why does God want you to make every effort? Because he wants you to be effective and productive. Like whatever place God has put you in in life, whatever family you belong to, whatever street you live on, whatever place you go to school or work, wherever you go to church, do you honestly believe in your heart that God put you there to make it better? Because

he did. You're not part of your family as an accident; like God planted the seed of faith in your heart and he wants produce. He wants fruit; that's what it means to be productive. And just like a gardener wouldn't put a seed in the ground and just be happy if no fruit came, God didn't put the seed of faith in your heart without wanting, deeply desiring you to make a difference. And so God wants you to be the kind of person that when you leave that job, like something's missing because you changed it; you blessed it. He blessed you that you could make that place better. That your brothers and sisters would be thankful that you are part of their family. That your neighbors would say, "Man, I've lived a lot of streets next to a lot of people but I've never lived next to someone like this." "I've been to a lot of churches with a lot of people who came and sang the songs and prayed the prayers but man the way people love me in that place was so different." Like God wants you to be that kind of person, as Peter's compelling reason why.

But can I be real with you? It's not going to be simple. I've tried to remind myself of that as I've made some pretty aggressive goals for the New Year. My wife and I are planning a summer vacation; a road trip with our kids. We want to take about 10 or 14 days, travel east, hit D.C., New York, and Boston. But you know, as I went online what I realized? Those places are expensive! Hotels and meals and gas prices and oil changes and as I tried to crunch the budget of being one that long, I realized that I don't have the money. And so we set a resolution. Our resolution was my wife and I are not going to go out to eat for six months. And if you felt the virgin birth was a miracle - it was January 2nd and I forgot to pack a lunch and I'm like, "I need to go out to eat!" I almost broke it like 36 hours after I made the resolution. This can be hard for us. Like my wife and I both work fulltime jobs, we put in about 50 hours a week, so when Friday comes and it's date night, we do not want to come home and cook; we want to have someone else cook for us. Like, can we do this?

So I bought a mutual gift for Christmas that I want to show to you: A cookbook. And what I love about this cookbook is that it has lots of pictures. Alright, check this out - this cookbook not only has a picture of every single recipe but also every single ingredient that's in the recipe. So this is like a super dude's cookbook; I really like this. And do you know what it's called? "Simple: The Easiest Cookbook in the World." Check this out - no recipe has more than four steps or six ingredients. Like, I can do that! Now why did I buy this cookbook for me and my wife? Because we want to make like this grand change in our life and save hundreds, hopefully thousands, of dollars but we still wanted it to be simple. And I would love to make you some like great Sunday promise that making the change you were just dreaming about would be simple but, come on, let's be real - it won't and Peter knows that. That's why he doesn't just say to his friends, you know, just pray and let go and let God and you'll change. No, he said, "Make every effort." It's not guaranteed to happen. He says, "For if you possess these qualities." Peter knows it's going to be a ton of work.

And can I be blunt with you - I wonder if that's why last year wasn't as good as you wanted it to be? You know what so often happens in Christianity? Is we come to church and we feel bad because we didn't do the thing that the pastor said or the reading suggested and so we pray, maybe we shed a tear, we ask God for his forgiveness, and then do you know what we do? Nothing. We don't read a book, we don't memorize a passage, we don't ask for accountability,

we don't reach out for help; we think a song and a prayer on a Sunday is going to change us. And it doesn't.

And I want to be real with you, like the devil does not want there to be more love in your life, more self-control, more generosity, and more kindness. He's going to fight you and the world that we live in is addicted to short term pleasure; it knows nothing of perseverance or self-control or godliness and it will try to mold you into its image. And there is something that you were born with that's in my heart, too, that does not want to do what God wants; it wants to do what I want and that means that when the Bible says to grow in faith, you have to be like a hardworking farmer. You have to be like an Olympian training to win the prize. You have to run the race without giving up. You have to fight the good fight. That's exactly what it's going to be. And so, let me push you; let me on behalf of God give you a kick in the pants. Are you ready to work? Not just to see different results but to put in different effort? Are you ready to change your schedule, your budget, your habits? Are you ready to throw out everything that would hinder you and actually have the kind of habits that would make a lasting change in your life?

Or maybe you've tried that, too? Maybe for some of you, today is God's kick in the pants. Like a reminder, come on, you're not changing because you're not trying, but I'll bet there's a whole bunch of you who would say, "But, Pastor, I have tried. I have prayed. I did confess that sin at my group and they prayed for me and they kept me accountable and I confessed the same sin the next week and the next week and the semester ended and I'm still struggling." "And I didn't want to go back to the bottle," and "I wanted to just be okay with my body," and "I didn't want to click on those same websites," and "I didn't want to go after him again when you know he pushed my buttons." Jesus once said the spirit is willing by the flesh is weak. And a new year and a new sermon series and another Sunday, you probably know might not change that.

But that's actually why I love Peter. Did any of you notice something that I skipped in the passage behind me? I talked to you about effort and adding to your faith; I talked about the seven qualities in increasing measure. I talked about being effective and productive in your knowledge of Jesus but what did I skip? "For this very reason," which very good Bible students should have made you raise your internal hand and say, "Wait - what reason? Pastor, that says 2 Peter 1:5-8 but what came in verses 3 and 4?" and that's the really good part. It's what makes resolutions and Christian's goals uniquely beautiful and inspiring instead of burdensome and crushing. And so, if the constant improvement just feels like exhausting to you, you need to listen to what Peter says before he tells you to start. Checking out these incredible words from verses 3 and 4 - he says, "God's divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." I love that. Before you give anything or give up anything else, Peter wants to start with what God has given you. If you're kind of nerdy and theological, before Peter gets to your sanctification, he talks about your salvation. Before he says a word about what you need to do, he wants to remind you what Jesus did for you first. Before he gets to the law and your obedience, he wants to start with the gospel of God's promise. Before he gets to the path, he wants you to talk about the peace that you can find in Jesus.

And he does it in such an amazing way - I love Peter. He says, "His divine power." The word "power" in Greek is the word "dunamis," where we get our word "dynamite." There's like this explosive power from God except - I love Peter - it's not just regular dynamite; it's divine dynamite. Like there's this explosive, motivating power that comes from God and it gives you everything that you need. Like what would you need to make that change in your life? Would you need hope and forgiveness? Would you need God's presence and his power? You have it. Would you need to belong to a heavenly Father's family who unconditionally loves you? It's already yours. Would you need Jesus to forgive you every time after you fail? It already happened. Would you need God not to abandon you but the Holy Spirit to stick with you through all the ups and downs, the promises kept and broken, he is already there. His divine power has given us everything we need. God's very great and precious promise; like I will never leave you and I'll never forsake you. People come and go, boyfriends come and go, spouses can come and go, God will not come and go. His very great and precious promise is that he will be with you always.

Or how about this one: He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. That your heavenly Father will not let the devil have free reign and devour you according to your weakness. He will always provide a way out. There's not a single temptation you will face that with the help of the Holy Spirit you can't escape and participate in the divine nature of a holy God. Or how about this one: His mercy is new every morning. If something comes out of your mouth tomorrow that you regret, guess what will be there the morning after you wake up with regret? His mercy. And when you can't believe, "Man, after that sermon series, I did that again!" Guess what's going to be there? His mercy. Every single morning when you wake up, guess what? The mercy of God will rise with the sun and it will shine on you. Or how about this one: The faithfulness of God is great. If he makes a promise, a resolution to you, he can't break it. And so Romans 5 says where sin increases, grace increases all the more. You cannot out-punt the coverage of God's forgiveness. You never do something so horrific that he says I'm done with you. These are the very great and precious promises of God and they change us. They inspire us, they forgive us, they cleanse us, they give us a fresh start.

So if you're taking notes, before Peter gets to the start, he has another word for you; that God wants to keep you "fresh." He just wants to fill you with his forgiveness, his love, his spirit, and his power so every morning you can wake up fresh. I love how artist Chris Powers pictures this. If you've been around our church for a while, you know that we're kind of addicted to the artistry of Mr. Chris Powers. He made this great depiction of Colossians 3, which is a chapter about spiritual growth and leaving sin behind. Let me show you this kind of complex picture. He tries to picture you as like an upside down tree and if you look at the bottom of the picture, this is a tree that's producing fruit over the earth. This is Chris Power's way of saying that God wants you to be kind and loving and generous and self-controlled, to be faithful, and to like actually produce good fruit that's enjoyable for the people of this earth. Whatever place God has placed you, whatever family, workplace, team and church, that you would produce good fruit in that place.

Except look where the picture starts. The fruit's on the bottom but that good fruit only comes because it has great roots. And so running through our hearts and minds are these roots in the light and the glory of God. That in the heavens where Jesus is, where he has conquered your sin, risen from the dead, rules over all of the universe, your hearts and your minds are connected to that Jesus. And when you have roots like that, you produce fruit like that. Just like Peter's saying, we make every effort to add to our faith but that's not where we start; we start by being deeply rooted in the compassion, love, and patience of God.

In other words, I want you to be like Samuel Johnson but better. Ever heard that name before? Samuel Johnson was a popular author from the 1700s and his journal has survived the past 300 years. It turns out that Samuel Johnson had this bold resolution that he wanted to get up earlier than he normally awoke to spend some time and pray with God. Ever try to do that before? Like, I'm going to read the Bible more, I'm going to pray more, I'm busy so I'm going to get up earlier; that was Samuel Johnson's goal. So he wrote this in the year 1738 in his journal. He said, "Oh Lord, enable me to redeem the time that I have spent in sloth." Now, just so you know, sloth these days is an uber popular animal to put on sweatshirts but back in those days, it meant to be lazy and unproductive. He said, "God, don't let me spend more time in sloth." If you could page ahead 21 years in his journal, do you know what Samuel Johnson was praying? "Lord, enable me to shake off idleness and sloth." Two years after that, Samuel Johnson admitted, "I have resolved and I have resolved and I'm afraid to resolve again." Three years later in his journal, he promised God that he would get up at 6:00 a.m. to pray. Two years after that, he changed the number to 8:00 a.m., and a year after that, he promised God one of these days he'd get up at 8:00 a.m. and eventually work his way back to 6:00 a.m. And six years after that, when Samuel Johnson was an old man, he wrote these words in his journal: "When I look back upon resolutions of improvement, which year after year I have made and broken, why do I try to resolve again?" You ever felt that? Like why would I do this again? Here's his answer: "I try because reformation is necessary and despair is criminal." I like that. Samuel Johnson knew from decades of trying that change is not easy but he knew that reformation is necessary. He knew that God had called him to live a holy life and he could not stay the same.

But you know, I've always wanted to ask Samuel Johnson if he knew about Peter's words? That it's more than just writing a promise in your journal and asking God to make you strong. The place where a fresh start really starts is not with you but with God and so I pray today and this year, you have this man's passion but I actually pray that you have something more. I pray that you believe this: God's divine power has given you everything you need for agape life. And through Jesus' very great and precious promises, you have everything you need to escape the corruption and participate in the divine nature of our heavenly Father.

Brothers and sisters, it's time to start. But because of Jesus, we can start fresh. Let's pray.

God, we would love to change. We would love for you to break every chain that seems to hold us back. We would love for our relationships to be different, for our bodies and physical lives to be filled with self-control, for our bank accounts to be evidence of generosity and not greed. For our thoughts to be proof that we trust you and we don't give in to fear. But God, without you, that's never going to happen and we know it. And so we pray now, we take hold of your very

great and precious promise, that your word will not come back empty. That when we are rooted in Jesus and we make a commitment to being connected to him, it will produce fruit, just like you planned. So I pray, God, for our community of faith. I pray that we wouldn't have to go through these goals and resolutions alone. I pray that we can be honest about our struggles and, even more, I pray that you would put the right people in our life to remind us of your promises and your presence and your power.

God, thank you for loving us unconditionally. I thank you that we can make these goals and plan to grow without fear that you will reject us if we fail because we know that your grace is sufficient. Thank you, God, for everything you've said; thank you even more for everything you've done. We are truly grateful. We pray all these things with hope because Jesus is our hope. We ask it in his name, and all God's people who agreed, said "Amen."