

WHEN YOU JUST NEED TO START OVER...
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The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.... –Isaiah 61:1,2

Not long ago, I was having one of those days with my computer. It wouldn't let me save, modify, or delete any documents. **[blank screen]**

I don't know if I did something wrong—if I hit a wrong key or tried to do too many things at once, or if it was just that the computer was having a bad day—but it was really frustrating. I mean, when you've got things to do with the one tool you do most of your work with and that single tool is broken, it's like all the world has stopped. What do you do **now**?

I tried everything I could think of to fix the problem. Nothing worked. So in the end, I fell back to the old standby. When all else fails, click **restart**. **[restart]**

I did...and the problem went away. Everything worked again, just the way it used to. I had my computer back again. But it felt **better** than that. It felt like I had my **life** back again.

And all I had to do was click and start over.

Don't you sometimes find yourself wishing you could do that with life? Things get messed up. Maybe it's your own fault; you did something wrong. Maybe not; somebody else has caused the mess you now have to clean up. But until it's resolved, it's almost as if everything has completely stopped and you just wish you could get on with your life.

If only you could push "restart." Shut it down. Reboot. Wipe the memory clean. And then begin again with a fresh start. **[blank screen]**

Would it surprise you to hear that you **can**? Well, it's true. You **can** go back and reclaim your life. You can reboot, refresh, restart—and get your life back up and running. Only you have to understand something very important: When it happens, it's really not **your** doing, or mine.

It's what **Jesus** has done.

That's what Isaiah was referring to when he spoke that curious phrase you just heard a minute ago, "the year of the Lord's favor." It's what Jesus was referring to when at the beginning of his ministry he stood up in the synagogue in his home town and read this part of Isaiah's beautiful prophecy. "*The Lord has anointed me,*" he said, "*to preach good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...***" (Isaiah 61:1,2).

But what does that mean—that phrase "**the year of the Lord's favor**"? It might help to think of it this way. It's all about those times **when you just need to start over**. We want to take a closer look at that today.

WHEN YOU JUST NEED TO START OVER...

- 1. Look at the cross**
- 2. Confess your sins**
- 3. Share the peace of Christ's forgiveness**

Do that, and you **can** get your life back again. But remember, when it happens, it's not **your** doing; it's all about what **Jesus** has done.

The concept of starting over, of having a fresh start, was there already in Old Testament times. In the book of Leviticus, the Lord prescribed for the people of Israel a “Year of Jubilee.” *“Consecrate the fiftieth year.... It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property.... The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants”* (Leviticus 25:8,10,23).

It was intended to be a once-in-a-lifetime event, something that would happen just once every 50 years. **[The “year of the Lord’s favor”]** In that year, every debt was to be canceled, every slave was to be freed, and all the land that had been sold was to be returned to its original family, according to the way the land was first assigned by lot.

You see, the whole purpose of the Year of Jubilee was to break the cycle of poverty and reverse the inequities that happen when only a few people come to control most of the land and most of the wealth. If faithfully carried out, during the Year of Jubilee every economic injustice would be set right again. It would be like the nation getting a giant “reboot”—as if God were giving it a fresh start all over again.

And isn’t that just what Jesus came to do? **[“Suffering Servant”]**

He understood the harsh realities of this world—his Father’s creation gone bad, spoiled by self-centeredness and sin. He entered it as a child without a home...forced to flee to a foreign land to escape a king who saw him as a rival to his power...and for no cause. He experienced the spite of the devil and the hatred of men. He felt the scorn of those who ridiculed his claim to be the Son of God. He felt the pain of the whips upon his back. He heard the shouts and the taunts. “Crucify!” they said. And despite the clear injustice of it all, he kept his eyes fixed on the goal—to go to the cross and to make payment for the sins of the world. He did it to set things straight, to right the wrongs we suffer...and to wipe away the hurt, the pain that we ourselves inflict.

He did it to give the world a chance to start all over again. *“The Lord has anointed me,”* he said, *“to preach good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted...**to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor...**”* You see, it’s our sin that makes everything a mess. And it’s our Savior’s forgiveness that makes it all good once again.

When you just need to start over, look at the cross and confess your sins.

Restart...refresh...reboot...in God’s way. That may be the most important thing I can ever learn—if I just take it to heart and put it into practice in my life. We call it **confession and absolution**:

- **confession**—that is, admitting our sin...
- **absolution**—the announcement that our sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus, God forgives. In his mind, even the **memory** of our sin is wiped clean; it’s like a complete reboot of our spiritual lives.

And deep down, we **need** that, don’t we? **[blank screen]**

We live in a sinful world. We feel conflict in our relationships.

- It may be tension between a brother or sister...or between a husband and wife...
- It could be friction with a co-worker, a friend, or somebody else...

As long as it remains unresolved, it grows and festers and gets worse and worse. It’s so easy at those times to think about—to dwell on—what’s wrong with **that** person, with the **other** guy...what **they’ve** done **to you**...how much it **hurts**...and what’s wrong **with them**. It’s easy to see the sins and failings in **somebody else**. And it may all be true.

But that’s when I need to let go of that hurt.

I need to take a good look deep inside and see myself with the eyes of God. I need to see what’s wrong **with me**. I need to admit it **to myself**. I need to confess it **to God**. I need to share it with **those that I’ve hurt**.

In Psalm 32, King David wrote: *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long...”* He tried to cover up his sin, but that didn’t work. He still felt the agony of a guilty conscience. It wasn’t until all else failed that he finally hit “restart.” He said, *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin”* (Psalm 32:3,5). We **confess** our sins. Jesus **forgives**. And then, we can **rejoice**. Peter knew that feeling as well. He said, *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord”* (Acts 3:19).

When you just need to start over...look at the cross and confess your sins. It has the power to change **everything!**

As a Christian, this is one of my greatest blessings—to be able to confess my sins and to know the joy of forgiveness. But there’s more. As a Christian, it’s also my role to be there for others—to minister to the people in my life. That’s why Isaiah adds, *“And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God”* (Isaiah 61:6). We **all**—not just pastors—have the privilege of granting **absolution**.

As we gather for worship, we confess our sins and we hear the pastor speak the words of absolution. He says, *“I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* **We** need to hear that, but **the people in our lives** need to hear it, too. They need to hear it from **us**. They need to hear us say, “Jesus forgives you...and I do, too.” “It’s okay. We’re good.” If we can do that—even when there is friction in our lives—things get better in a hurry.

When you just need to start over...look at the cross...confess your sins...and share the peace of the forgiveness Christ won.

The season of Epiphany is a time when we think about how the gospel spread beyond the people of Israel to every nation on earth. It’s a good time for us to consider how we too can share the gospel...and grant the people in our lives a fresh start.

And for us, it all begins at home. AMEN.