

Instructions:

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



Series: Fresh Start

Who doesn't want a fresh start, a clean slate? That is exactly what Jesus offers us; he gives us the chance to begin anew every single day. But this is no ordinary fresh start. When we say yes to God's new beginning in our lives, we are saying yes to an adventure that will require courage, perseverance, and boldness. We are saying yes to having our world turned upside down and inside out. We are saying yes to being stirred up and to stirring things up. And one thing is for sure: this fresh start is so worth it. So, let's make it count.

Message description:

Jesus checks in with his disciples and asks them, who do you say that I am? Peter has the correct answer, the Christ. But it is clear from his next reaction that he still does not understand how that will include suffering, rejection, and death. Jesus has invited disciples to follow him before, but this is the first time he describes what that life will look like; self-denial and cross bearing. This is not suffering that comes by simply living in a broken world, or suffering we might seek out or endure intentionally as if suffering itself might be redemptive. No, this is suffering the consequences of following Jesus and being associated with him.

At the beginning of a new year the world clamors for us to set big goals, make big plans, become a better you. And for sure it is an opportunity to pause and assess our priorities. What will be your focus this year? And do the plans you have line up with the life of generosity, humility, and love that Jesus is calling you to?

Key Scripture

Mark 8:27-38

Questions Related to This Week's Message:

1. Did you make any new year's resolutions? How are they going?
2. What goals, plans, or dreams do you have for this year?
3. How do these plans line up with the life God is calling you into (as a disciple of Jesus Christ)?
4. Do these plans help you grow in love?
5. What is one focus you have in your spiritual life for 2024? Where would you like to grow?

Going deeper

Consider these reflections by Dr. Kate Bowler:

January 3, 2024 at 9:15 AM

If New Year's resolutions worked.
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I would be rescued from familiar self hatred.
I would be convinced of the goodness of unfinished days.
Stop looking for hidden secrets to health
or formulas to mental mastery.

I would never wonder about the lives of beautiful people.
I would believe a compliment the first time.
I might accept the infiniteness of knowledge
without feeling like I should have bottled it by now.

I would say, *look backwards not forwards,*
weren't you already brave?
Already kind?
Already good?

See? It's there. It's there.
You're already home. |

Saturday, January 6

Reason to try today:

I read a lovely article in the New York Times today about resolutions, and about adding the words "whenever possible" to the end of a good resolution. I will eat well (whenever possible.) I will get out of bed (whenever possible.) I will finish that project (whenever possible.)

Today you will try to try. Whenever possible. Today. That's it. You can make your hopes nice and teeny tiny, which can fit inside today.

Have a beautiful, terrible Saturday! ✨

Questions for reflection:

- If resolutions "worked" for you, what would be different in your life?
- How do you see that resolutions of self-improvement can run counter to the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ, and the idea that salvation/growth into holiness is a result of Christ's work on our behalf and not on own effort?
- How do you see that you are growing in grace and holiness, even as you mess up?
- How does it change considering your plans/goals/resolutions by adding "whenever possible" to them? Does this feel like a grace to you?

Close in prayer:

Pray together. Create intentional time and space to offer prayers for one another, that we might share in the comfort of Christ together and experience the Spirit's presence.

Consider the simple acronym of ACTS to guide your time of prayer together:

- A- Adoration.** *Share praise reports or reasons to praise God. (Reading a psalm together can help)*
- C- Confession.** *Leave space to pray silently or individually to confess sins.*
- T- Thanksgiving.** *Share something in the group that you are thankful for this week.*
- S- Supplication, or petition.** *Share concerns and prayer requests you have.*