

## Introduction

- Whenever Staci's phone doesn't work, she asks me, "What's wrong." I always give her the same answer, "Restart your phone." Restarting it doesn't always solve the problem, but often times it does. For whatever reason, restarting a phone clears used memory, clears out buggy issues, etc.
- Many of us would like a restart in different areas of our lives. Maybe we've made some bad financial decisions. Or, chose the wrong friends, or our marriages got off to a really rocky starts, or we made some mistakes in the way we parent our children. We'd like to turn back time and hit the restart button.
- In lots of areas of life you don't get a restart, but here's some good news - you can always restart in your walk with the Lord.
- Many of us know what it feels like to drift away from the Lord. there will be seasons when you drift away from the Lord. There are seasons when you aren't as passionate about the things of God as you once were, or you aren't as committed to Christ as you'd like to be. There are seasons when you drift into sin.
- Right now, there are some of us who would like a restart in our relationship with God. The good news is that God is always willing to let you start again. Because of God's grace, you can restart over and over again. The question is, how do you start again? That's the question [Ezra 3](#) answers.

- The story of Ezra is the story of a restart. After 70 years in exile, God allows His people to start again. In this passage, four ways you can start again with the Lord.

## Start over by returning to worship.

- vs. 1 - “When the seventh month arrived.” The seventh month was the most important month on the Jewish calendar. It was the start of the New Year in which the Jews celebrated the Feast of Trumpets - a festival that prepared the way for the Day of Atonement - which was followed by the Festival of Booths where Jews camped out for a week to remember how they had been delivered from Egypt and brought into the wilderness.
- They had not been back in the land long before they come together as one in Jerusalem. THIS is why they returned - to worship God. And during the most important time of the year, they gathered in Jerusalem. They rebuilt the altar at the site where the temple once stood.
- They’d only been back in the land for a short time. The land is desolate. There’s a city to rebuild. Homes to rebuild. BUT... they start with God.
- Starting over was returning to the place where God had made them a great nation and building an altar. Zerubbabel and Jeshua (the high priest) lead the way.
- In the Old Testament, An altar was a place of worship and sacrifice. In [Genesis 12:7](#), when Abraham first entered the Promised Land, he built an altar to worship the Lord.
- This altar built at the site of the temple. [Ezra 2](#) - thousands of priests returned to reconstitute the sacrificial system. For 70 years, no temple - no altar to bring their sacrifices.
- The altar was central to worship because at the altar something died in the place of sinful Jewish people so their sins could be atoned.

- vs. 3-4 offered burnt offerings each day and celebrated Festival of Shelters. Imagine the grief and the joy. The grief as they thought about their sins that led to 70 years in exile. The joy of being home and being able to reconstruct the altar where their sins could be atoned.
- Notice also the fear - would the surrounding nations attack? But, in courage, they kept on.
- They started over by returning to worship, and that's how you start over as well.
- **Reprioritize.** Jesus NOT a priority on a list of priorities. He determines the entire list. Everything finds its meaning in Him. Radical shift in the way you think, the way you live, the way you spend your time.
- **Repent.** Sacrificial system is done. You don't need an altar. You don't need a temple. You need the cross. The cross is where Jesus paid the price for our sins once and for all. When we drift, we come back to the finished work of Christ. We remember the price that was paid, and we ask God to restore our intimacy with Him ([1 John 1:9](#)). When was the last time you repented of your sins? Name the sin that has caused you to drift.

## Start over by recommitting to God's Word.

- The people worship, repent, and obey. vs. 2 - Offered sacrifices as it was written in the Law. vs. 4 - celebrated Festival of Shelters as prescribed. Offered sacrifices specified by ordinances. vs. 5 - offered sacrifices for all the Lord's appointed holy occasions. Note that everything their doing is accordance with the Law of God.
- Repentant people want to obey God because repentant people understand that disobedience is what caused them to drift in the first place. They were not obeying because they were trying to earn the favor

of God. They obeyed because God had shown them mercy by allowing them to return to the Promised Land.

- Starting over is realizing the way you have been living life is contrary to God's will and now you want to live God's way. Repentance is not simply feeling bad about your sin. It's choosing a new direction for your life - a life under the Word of God.
- How do you recommit to God's Word:
- **Listen and agree.** Most of us know what God's Word says. We know the Ten Commandments. We know the Sermon on the Mount. We know what the Bible says about things like gossip or forgiving others. We know what the Bible says about sex or controlling our anger. We hear what the Bible says, we just don't agree with it. We might say we agree, but our lives show we don't. We live in such a way that demonstrates that we think we know better than God. Starting over is saying, "I agree with God. I agree with what He says. I agree His will is best."
- **Be honest.** Be honest with yourself and with God. Admit how sin has affected your life. You can't restart with God while you're pretending everything is fine. We tend to minimize the damage of sin as if sin can't affect us. The reality is that you NOT doing what God's Word says causes relational damage, emotional damage, and distance in our walk with the Lord.
- **Take action.** You never regret obedience, but you often regret disobedience. Where is God calling you to obey right now? Confessing hidden sin? Forgiving someone? Ending a sinful relationship? Leading your family spiritually? Controlling your tongue? Becoming generous? Sharing the Gospel?

## Start over by celebrating God's steadfast love.

- They build the altar, and then the people begin rebuilding the temple. Gifts had been given for the reconstruction of the temple (2:68).
- The rebuilding of temple parallels the building of the first temple. Solomon also received lumber from Lebanon. The forests of Lebanon were known for their cedar forests. Tyre and Sidon controlled the trade in the area, so the people exchanged oil for their services to ship the precious lumber to Jerusalem.
- Also, a fulfillment of prophecy ([Isaiah 60:11-13](#)).
- They began to rebuild the temple in the second month of the second year (vs. 8). King Solomon also built the first temple in the second month. The parallels are intentional. Israel is being restored. God is not done with His people.
- The Levites and the priests supervise the work. Once the foundation is laid there's a celebration! The temple is not finished yet, but they couldn't help but celebrate the progress that was being made.
- We often don't want to give God praise until he's completely brought us out of hard times, but God is worthy of your praise at every stage of your spiritual growth as He is building on the foundation that He has laid in your life.
- The descendants of Asaph - the singers - led in worship. They sang a familiar Psalm from the time of King David - [Psalm 136](#) - His faithful love to Israel endures forever. All the people gave a shout of praise. God was at work!
- [Psalm 136](#) retells the story of Israel with the constant refrain, "His faithful love endures forever." The people are saying they are a part of that story - God's faithful love continued to endure with His people evidenced in the reality that He brought them out of the promised land. Standing in

the rubble looking at the challenge before them of rebuilding of the temple, they were able to sing praise.

- Israel's testimony of God's faithful love is our testimony.
- **We don't celebrate only when life is easy.** We should celebrate in the good days. It was easy to celebrate in [2 Chronicles 7](#) when the first temple was built under Solomon and Israel was at the height of national power. It's easy for us to celebrate when life seems to going well.
- **We celebrate in the hard days.** Temptation is to drift into sin when life is hard, but what if you worshiped in the hard times instead of drifting? What if you worshiped because of your confidence in the work of God? If life is hard right now, make time to remember all the ways you've seen God at work over the years.
- We celebrate when God allows us to start over. Even if you have drifted, there's still grace. You can sing of His faithful love. In His love because allows you to repent time after time. He doesn't cast you away from Himself, He continues to draw you back. If God is drawing you back to Himself today, give Him praise! Thank Him for His steadfast love!

## **Start over with a longing for the completion of your story.**

- It's a joyous day. Many shouted with joy (vs. 12). But, not all shouted with joy. Some wept loudly. Many of the older priests, Levites, and family heads remembered the first temple. They remembered its beauty, it's grandeur, and how they met with God in this holy place.
- Now, they saw ruins. They couldn't imagine how this new temple could be as grand as what once stood in this sacred spot. They wept. They longed for something better. They wept because they saw the consequences of their sin is what led to the destruction of the first temple.

- The mixed emotions were heard from far away. The shouting, the weeping - it was all present.
- Whether they were weeping or shouting, they all longed for a better day.
- Our lives are similar to the people who came back from exile - mixed emotions, ups and downs.
- We start over with longing for the completion of our story - we start over knowing a better day is coming than what we've settled for.
- **The moments of joy don't compare to the joy that's coming.** Celebrate when God gives you victory over a particular sin. Celebrate when you see someone come to faith in Jesus. Celebrate when God speaks to you through His Word. Celebrate when you see spiritual growth in your friends, your spouse, your children. But... know that every victory you experience in this life is just a foretaste of the victory that is to come when Christ returns.
- **The moments of grief don't compare to the eternal glory that's coming.** There's a lot of grief in this life as a result of sin. There's grief over your own sin and the damage that it's caused. While your sins are forgiven, you can't erase the consequences of sin. Some of us are dealing with broken marriages, children that have forsaken us, friends that have left us all as a result of sin. It hurts.
- Yet, God is still writing His story. His steadfast love endures forever. And some day, Jesus will return and wipe away every tear.
- Ultimately, those who returned to the land didn't need a new temple. They needed a Savior, and so do you. They needed the Messiah who would come and once and for all defeat sin and give hope of life eternal.
- For some of us, it's not a matter of starting over, it's starting a relationship with God for the first time. It's believing that God loved you so much that He sent His Son to die the death you deserve only to rise

again from the dead to save you from your sins. This morning, repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your soul.