



INTRODUCTION

[Leader Note: I made this series to be taught in January to start the new year. However, I think this would also fit well at the start of a new school year. Use it whenever it works best for you!]

I'm so glad you're here! We're kicking off a new year with a new series! Let's be honest: we all love the idea of a fresh start, don't we? Whether it's the first day of a new year, a new semester, or even just the first page of a brand-new journal, there's something about a clean slate that fills us with hope. It's like hitting the reset button on life, where suddenly, all the messes we made, the missed opportunities, and the regrets can be left behind.

But here's the thing: how many of us have made New Year's resolutions that never lasted beyond January 15th? Or maybe, like me, you've promised yourself that this semester you're going to keep up with your homework, only to fall behind by Week 3. We love the idea of starting over, but often, it feels like the new beginning doesn't last very long, does it?

We get pumped about turning the page, but it's like we're reading the same story over and over. The same habits, the same patterns, the same struggles. It's like we've been living in the movie *Groundhog Day*, stuck in a time loop of our own making.

TRANSITION

I bet I'm not alone here. We all have stuff we wish we could leave behind: a bad habit, a painful memory, a relationship that went wrong. We long for a reset button in life, but it often feels like no matter how hard we try, we just can't escape the past.

And here's the frustrating part: the world is full of advice on how to change your life.

- "Try this app."
- "Read this book."
- "Watch this TED Talk."
- "Follow this influencer's routine."

Yet, after all the advice, we still find ourselves right back where we started. The truth is, it's exhausting trying to change when it feels like nothing is really changing.

But what if there was a way to truly start fresh? What if there was a way to step into a new season, not by our own effort but by something greater than ourselves? That's where today's passage from Isaiah comes in.

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 43:18-19 (CSB) says, *"Do not remember the past events; pay no attention to things of old. Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert."*

Here, God was speaking to His people, Israel, who had been through a really rough season. They'd been in exile, far away from home, their identity shattered, their future uncertain. They were stuck, lost in a wilderness, not just literally, but spiritually and emotionally.

And what was God's message to them? "Forget the past, because I'm doing something new." Now, God wasn't telling them to pretend the past never happened. He was not saying, "Let's just sweep all that mess under the rug." No, He acknowledged their pain, their failures, their regrets. But He also said, "Your past does not define your future. I am the one who defines your future."

Let's break this down a bit, because this passage is rich with hope.

POINT #1

Focus on the future rather than dwelling on the past.

God began in Isaiah 43:18 (CSB) with, *“Do not remember the past events; pay no attention to things of old.”*

Isn't it interesting that God knows our tendency to hold on to what was? He knows our inclination to let yesterday's stories and struggles define today's opportunities. For Israel, their history was full of some high points; God had parted the Red Sea, fed them with manna, and led them by fire and cloud. But their history also had some dark times: wandering, rebellion, and painful captivity. These sound a lot like the ups and downs we experience, doesn't it?

When God tells us not to dwell on the past, He's not asking us to disregard or disrespect it. He's challenging us to hold it in the right place. There's a difference between remembering something to learn from it and living with something that no longer exists. If you're still giving a significant amount of your mental and emotional energy to a past you cannot change, you're using up resources meant for the new thing God is calling you to.

Imagine you're driving a car, trying to navigate the road ahead while looking in the rearview mirror. You're bound to crash! There's a reason the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror. It's because God has more for you up ahead than anything you've left behind. To embrace that, we need to free ourselves from the past and the baggage it carries.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (CSB) is my favorite passage when it comes to this. It reads, *“let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”*

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