

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
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Second Chances for a Fresh Start

Luke 13:6-9

November 26, 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mOf89SSCgw>

I conducted a funeral this past week for a 24-year-old that overdosed on Methadone. I was encouraged by his uncle a recovering addict to tell people to use this as an opportunity to turn their lives over to a power greater than themselves so that they might be brought back to sanity and be given a fresh start, because he knew that there are many present who would be needing to have a wakeup call.

After the service many expressed gratitude, however, there was one man who said to me, "I don't believe in God; neither did my father or grandfather." I said after looking him up and down and seeing that he looked a bit rough around the edges, "How's that working for you?" He responded gruffly, "Just fine." I said, "I'm glad to hear it. But if you don't mind, would you tell me what you do believe, given what you just experienced today?" He said "Sure, I believe what my father and grandfather, who are dead now, believed. And that is, that we are put in the ground and return to become one with the earth. Later, we grow to become part of nature and grow into trees." "I can respect that" I said. "But do you know what they do with trees?" "No. What?" "They cut them down. Then cut them up into bits mash them up and then make paper. And on the paper they print Bibles. Do you want to get to know your grandfather? Here's my bible." It might give you a fresh start.

Now, that was the man's problem at the funeral – he wanted to be the god of his own life. And he was making a mess of it. However, we all do, don't we when we try to be the God of our own life?

The parable is about having a second chance for a fresh start.

Maybe that is where you are in your life this morning! You feel that you have made so many mistakes, you have failed so many times and you feel and believe that you have no future. The good news is, God is saying, "It's not over; I have plans for your life. I am about to do something new for you."

This morning I want to share with you, that you have a second chance to Make a Fresh Start?" I want to share with you a formula for starting over. S.T.A.R.T.

I

S – Stop making excuses. *The Parable was clear. The grower didn't make any excuses. He admitted things were not as they should be.*

To make a fresh start in life, we have to stop making excuses and blaming others. We have to stop seeing ourselves as victims of the circumstances around us and living in denial. The reality is that people can hurt us, betray us, and fail us. Some circumstances can overwhelm us and be too much for us. But the only person that can ruin your life is you. Nobody can ruin your life without your permission. You can use what has happened as an excuse to give up or you can choose use what has happened to keep going.

Proverbs 28:13 "A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them he gets another chance." In other words, that person gets a fresh start. Starting over begins when we stop making excuses for our life.

It is hard to admit when we are wrong. None of us like to admit, "I made a mistake, and I blew it." God says, "That if we admit the mistake, if we admit our failures, and if we admit our sin, then we get another chance in life.

Tommy Lasorda once said, "There are three types of base players: those who make it happen, those who watch it happen, and those who wonder what happens." And I would say that's true of most things in life.

There was an article a few years ago in which a man gave his idea of a perfect world. He said, "In a perfect world you would feel as good at 60 as you did at 17. And you would be as smart at 60 as you thought you were at 17."

"In a perfect world professional athletes would be complaining because schoolteachers were signing multi-million dollar contracts."

"In a perfect world potato chips would have calories, but if eaten with dip, the calories would be neutralized."

"In a perfect world, the check in the mail would always come early and be for more than you expected it to be."

The truth is: this is not a perfect world and it never will be! But it can become a lot better in the coming year if you follow this formula.

II

A second chance for a fresh start begins with S- Stop making excuses. And secondly, **T - take an inventory of your life.** *The Parable shows how the grower did see that it had not produced in three years.*

As you take inventory of your life in starting over one has to be fearless. One has to look and truly see is there any fruit? And if there is, is it sweet or bitter.

After officiating a funeral, the administrator came up to me visibly upset about something. She said she had just broken up with a guy who had abused her physically and emotionally and he was the third guy she has dated for long periods of times to do that. She said, you have got to help me to stop choosing these abusive guys. I told her that could take time to find the underlying issue and I could help or refer her to someone who would. She asked how long that would take. And I told her it could take up to 6 months or longer to get to the underlying issues and to figure out a way to overcome them. She shouted. "I don't have that long."

To which I said, I can tell her away that will likely work immediately, but she would have to promise to go to counselling after because if she didn't the relationship

wouldn't last. She promised so, I said, that next time you go into a room and are attracted to a guy. Go right up to him look him right in the face, then turn and ask the guy beside him out. The guy she overlooked will be less likely to be abusive and the guy she was attracted to would be more likely to be abusive.

A few months later, she told me she had done what I suggested and was now in counselling and the relationship is going well. 20 years have passed and things still seem to be going well.

Whatever is stopping you from achieving what you are wanting in you live is likely got more to do with what is going in within you then what is going on around you...

III

Stop making excuses, take an inventory, And the third part of the formula for getting second chance for a fresh start begins with, **A - act in faith.** *The grower said in a sense I believe I can get this to produce. Which takes faith.*

What are you expecting out of life? Are things going to be better or worse? You get what you choose. Leslie Wetherhead, a preacher of many years ago, used to pray, "God give me more faith I need more faith." That is until he realized that he wasn't living up to the faith he knew. It wasn't his doubts, but the faith that he wasn't living up to the faith he believes that was the problem.

A man was being tailgated by a stressed-out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly the light turned yellow. Just in front him was a crosswalk, so he did the right thing--he stopped at the crosswalk even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman hit the roof and her horn. She screamed because she had missed her chance to get through the intersection. As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window. She looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, however, a policeman approached the cell door and opened it. He escorted her back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

As he handed her possessions to her, he said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him.

"I noticed the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday School' bumper sticker and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally I assumed you had stolen the car." She wasn't acting on the faith she knew.

IV

The formula for getting a fresh start begins with S- Stop making excuses, T - take an inventory of your life, A - act in faith and fourthly **R - Refocus.** The grower focused on the basics, repotting the plant, fertilizer and a future and making most of every

moment he had in life and in the end leaving a lasting legacy. That meant he had to let go of the past. He failed forward refocusing on the future.

Henry David Thoreau understood this said in Walden; "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

V

The formula for getting a second chance for fresh start begins with **S**- Stop making excuses, **T** - take an inventory of your life, **A** - act in faith, **R** – Refocus and finally, **T** – **Trust**.

He trusted that he would be given a chance and he was. One man said to his friend: "Say, you look depressed. What are you thinking about?" "My future," was the quick answer. "What makes it look so hopeless?" "My past." We all understand that. However, to get a fresh start means moving forward trusting.

The famous preacher Dwight L. Moody once said, "Trust in yourself and you are doomed to disappointment. Trust in your friends and they will die and leave you. Trust in money and you may have it taken from you. Trust in your reputation and some slanderous tongue may blast it. But trust in God and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity." You think about that. Amen.