

Newb and Improved

Moving Forward by Starting Over

July 5, 2026



Today we're learning to embrace the *discomfort we despise to find the future we desire*. Cuz, we all want to chase our *dreams* but none of us like the way *change* feels. And when we realize that *living* our best life requires *leaving* our old life – our fear of the *unfamiliar* can make us *question* if everything we want is really worth starting from *scratch*. So, before we take another step we need to set our heart *straight* so we won't *hesitate* when we have the *chance* to choose the *new life* we've always wanted! And that starts with *honestly* asking, **do you want something better?**



Uh... *duh!* Who doesn't want better? But then **why did Jesus ask the same question to that poor guy by the pool who waited 38 years to be healed?** Now, we've been following Joseph on the *uncomfortable* journey to the *literal* future of his *dreams* – and along the way, we keep seeing how God's path *forward* often takes us through some *foreign* and frightening places. But since today is *baptism* Sunday, we're gonna *pause* Joe's progress and take a *side-quest* to Bethesda to see the *first* step every faithful story needs to get *started*. And while Joe's journey has been rated R for some harsh *reality*, today's story is rated PG – cuz it's *Pretty Godly*... for down here. So... **once upon a time**, there was a *pool* in Bethesda the waters would occasionally get *stirred up*, and the *first* person to get *in* – got *healed!*

[So,] Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there ... He asked him, **"Do you want to get well?"** [And while the *question* feels *aggressive* cuz the *answer* seems *obvious* – notice the guy *doesn't* say yes:] "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred." – John 5:2-7 NIV

That's not an *answer* – that's an *explanation*. But I get it; after thirty-eight years, he didn't *just* have a *condition*, he had a *system*. He had his *spot* and his *story* – and he had a *reason* for his *routine*. He had his *mat*. But **sometimes we get so used to our mat, we forget why we want to move.** Amen? Well, I'm glad you agree! Cuz we're gonna *practice* what I preach!

So, if you are *physically* comfortable, I want everybody to stand up and *move* to a *seat* you've never sat in before. *Not* three seats over – I mean *new section*, *angle*, and *neighbors*. Go ahead. I'll wait.

What do you think? *Crazy, right?* It's a whole new world! For *me*, too! Cuz *now*, some of you are *mad at me*, some of you are *pretending* to like it, and some of you are *thinking*, **"I don't like the lights, sound, or smell over here. Why'd we come on a Noah week?"** Which I guess means things *are* the same for *me* and just different for *you!* But just think about how *strange* everything *is* – just cuz you're sitting somewhere *new*. That's the point; **new feels weird before it feels better.** Yet **everything better begins as something new.** So, if you want *better*, you *gotta* leave your mat for something *new!*

You *don't* discover your favorite food until you try it for the first time. You *don't know* you're good at *basketball* until you *join* your *first team*. You don't *find* your best *friend*, your *spouse*, your *calling*, your *church*, or your *Savior* until you start a *new conversation* and *relationship*. So, *why* do we *wait*?



Well, **we're loyal to the familiar – even when the familiar is failing.** And psychologists have a bunch of names for it: status quo bias, loss aversion, sunk cost, and learned helplessness. But the street-level version is simple: **we prefer the pain we know to the possibility we don't.** Our brain measures change by what we lose over what we gain; so we cling to the things that cost us; and after enough disappointment, we can stop trying to escape even when freedom is standing in front of us asking, **“Do you want to get well?”** Cuz our foolish flesh *fears all change* – and **healing isn't just relief from pain, it's choosing a change for the better.** And *everything better begins* when we start to pursue *something new*. But because we need *help* to *overpower* the fear of leaving the *familiar*:

Jesus said to him, **“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”** At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. – John 5:8-9 NIV

A stern, three-part pep-talk is *all it took*; **Get up. Pick up. Walk.** Get up and *stop* letting stuck be your identity; pick up your mat and carry away what used to carry you; and *walk* into the *new life* you said you *wanted*. Cuz *better* doesn't start when things are *easy*; **better starts when Jesus tells you to take a step; and you do.** But that *first* step is the toughest of all cuz *nobody* likes being a *newb*.

Just ask gamers – they coined the term for *inexperienced*, *awkward*, and clearly *inferior* players. So, of course, *none* of us want to be *that* person – **we want to be seen as competent and comfortable** – knowing *where* to sit, *what* to say, *how* to look, and *how* to avoid embarrassment.



And yet, **every expert you admire – had to choose to live as a newbie.** Every *musician* hit *wrong notes*; every *athlete* dropped the *ball*; every *chef* burned their *biscuits*; every married couple had their first *fight*; and every *mature* Christian *stumbled* through their first *prayer*, *offering*, *Bible study*, *volunteer role*, and their first *public* step of *faith*.

Cuz every journey has a *starting* line – but **you can't benefit from something you won't begin.** And this is especially *hard* for the people who've gotten *good* at being *the old us*. Cuz *some* of you *aren't* failing at our *old, earthly life* – you're actually *crushing it!* You've learned how to be *competent*, *respected*, *funny*, *useful*, *successful*, *independent*, and *in control*. You've worked *hard* to become *mature* members of society who know how to get things *done*, lead a *meeting*, solve a *problem*, raise a *family*, run a *business*, and pay the *bills*. But – that *all* makes it *hard* to hear Jesus when He shows up and says, **“Good job! But, get up, pick up, and walk away – we're starting over!”**

But *that's* the message when He says we *all* gotta be *born again!* And *nobody* who put in the *work* to *become* a *success* ever wants to hear they have to *reset* their *social* standing – to *baby status!* In fact, *that* was the Corinthian church's problem. They were *gifted*, *talented*, *smart*, and *successful*; but because they wouldn't *fully* leave their *old* life, they *struggled* to *start* the *new* life! So Paul says,

Brothers and sisters, I *could not* address you as people who live **[the new life]** by the Spirit but as people who are *still worldly* — **[AKA]** mere *infants* in Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:1 NIV



But, the problem *wasn't* that their new *faith* made them *newbs* at *life* — the problem *was* they wouldn't pick up *and* walk away from the *old life* they had built. Cuz *old habits die hard*; even when they *live* on a *mat* — but **new habits start hard until the old lose their hold**. And like the *Corinthians*, **some of us are too attached to the success of our old-life identity to embrace our new-life immaturity**.

And that means some of us *need* to admit something very *uncomfortable*: we can be an old-life *all-star* but we still gotta start as a *new-life newb*! Whether you're CEO, MVP, or PhD, **nobody skips spiritual kindergarten!**

None of your *old credits* transfer to your *new life*! Which means, we all have to accept that a 12-year-old in Sunday School might be far more spiritually mature than their 50-year-old coach who's a legend in the game but a brand-new believer in Jesus. Cuz, as Christians,

You were taught ... to put off your old self ... to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God. — Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV

It's *not* that you were *all wrong*, it's just that the *old you mentality* obstructs the *new you spirituality*. The *old you* may know how to *win arguments*, but **the new you has to learn how to love enemies**. The *old you* may know how to *build an image*, but **the new you has to learn how to be embarrassed**. The *old you* may know how to *be in charge*, but **the new you has to learn how to be obedient**.



And *surrender*, *humility*, and *submission* are *hard* lessons to learn cuz they make *everyone* feel *inexperienced* again — *regardless* of what we've *accomplished*. But that's not *failure*. That's *birth*. And that's why getting *better* in your *new life* doesn't grow from what we already know — **your new life grows better by being a newb ready to improve**.

And *that's* what Jesus was asking the man by the pool, **“Are you ready and willing to be a newb — and improve?”** Cuz once He knows *that*, He knows you *trust* His *love* enough to *start* from *scratch* and *follow* His *lead* — even though the *new path* is *foreign* and *frightening*.

Cuz Jesus isn't *just* saying **“Get up, pick up, and walk away,”** He's saying, **“Love Me, trust Me, and come to Me!”** Cuz Jesus wants to *show us* a preview of what we *gain* when we choose *new* — to help us make the *change* and *leave* the *old life* we have to *lose*. The way He got *Peter* to take a *scary step*:

[Cuz He walked to him on the waves of a storm to say] “It is I. Don't be afraid.” “Lord, if it's You,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to You on the water.” “Come,” He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. — Matthew 14:27-29 NIV

Atta boy Pete! The guy at the *pool* may have left the *familiarity* of his *miserable mat* when Jesus called *him* to something new — but *Peter* left the *safety* of his beloved *boat* when Jesus called him to walk away from the *whole world* he thought *he knew*.

Cuz faith doesn't make us better by keeping where it already feels safe. **Faith makes us better when we go wherever Jesus calls us to come.** Peter didn't walk on *water* cuz he trusted the *water* – that's stupid unless you're ice-skating! Peter walked on water cuz he trusted the *voice* that called him out.

[But as a **total newb,**] When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. – Matthew 14:30-31 NIV

Sound familiar? Peter was *fine* while *Jesus* had his attention – but he *sank* the second the *wind* stole it away. That's classic newb faith! **We let old fear, doubt, and discomfort make us stutter, stumble, and sink!** Cuz *re-learning* to walk is *hard* – and it makes *nervous* newbs easily *distracted!*

But don't miss the *good* news: when Peter *started* sinking, Jesus didn't say, "**Nice one, newb!**" He reached out and *caught* him. Cuz Jesus doesn't call beginners into new life so He can *mock* their *failures*; **He calls us to be closer, so His love is can keep us safe while we make mistakes.** Cuz



There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear ... We love because He first loved us. – 1 John 4:18-19 NIV

And **that's why we're so excited for baptism today!** We get to *witness* how God's love *empowers* ordinary *old* people to take *huge* scary steps in their *new life!* We get to watch *live* as people *answer* the call of a God who's asking *them* to publicly *leave* their *mat*, *step* out of the *boat*, and *walk themselves* into the *only* pool that leads to *new life* that *never ends!*



[Cuz God says] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean ... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you ... And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees. – Ezekiel 36:25-27 NIV



You hear that? God's not just adding *upgrades* – our new *walk* means we get a whole new life cuz our new *heart* can follow a new *Master*.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
[And we know they're **newbs** cuz the **weird** walk keeps getting **better!**] – 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

And **that's why your new seat was good for you – not cuz it was comfortable, but because it wasn't!** And *that* made it *harder* for autopilot to *kick in* so *you* should *check out*. You *had* to get comfortable with *discomfort* – which is the *key* to the *Christian* life: we gotta get comfortable *leaving* old *seats*, old *excuses*, old *fears*, old *mats*, and old *boats* so we can live a better *life*, in a better *place*, with a better *attitude*, and a better *Master*. **We gotta get good at change if we wanna get better at life.**

So, even if you end up in your *old* seat *next* week, **spend this week looking at your life and really think about what mat God's calling you to walk away from.** Cuz, when you know His *heart* and hear His *voice*, you can trust His *plan* will put you on the path to *everything* your heart *desires* – even if it *starts* with the *vulnerability* your heart *despises!* Just ask everyone we're about to *baptize!* Cuz it sure *ain't* comfortable doing something *new* – but it sure is *exciting* starting something *better!* So, remember, *Jesus* came to change your *life*, not your *mat!* But *that* only happens when you choose to *get up*, *pick up*, and *walk while it's weird* – cuz **you gotta be a Newb, before you get improved!**