



RYAN STRATTON

Life
GLITCHED

How God Helps Teens to Break
Free and Begin Again

Ryan Stratton

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**How God Helps Teens to Break Free
and Begin Again**

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This resource can, and should, be used for free to all who are seeking a life change.

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*Think of this book like a guide for when life glitches
- you'll learn how to reset, rebuild, and live the life
God designed for you.*

Introduction: Why This Book Matters for You

Life can feel overwhelming when you're a teenager. There's pressure to fit in, to keep up, to look like you've got it all together—even when inside you feel like you're falling apart. Maybe you scroll through social media and see everyone else's highlight reels while your own life feels messy. Maybe you've made mistakes you wish you could undo. Or maybe you just feel stuck, like no matter what you try, you can't get past the guilt, the shame, or the loneliness.

Here's the truth: you are not alone. Every teenager I've ever counseled, mentored, or prayed with has felt this way at some point. I've sat with students who were crushed by peer pressure, who hid their struggles with anxiety or temptation, who carried family pain they couldn't talk about, and who thought their story was too broken for God to care about. But again and again, I've seen God step into the middle of their struggle and give them hope.

Think of your life like a video game. Sometimes you hit a level where you keep failing, no matter how many times you try. You lose lives, you make mistakes, you get frustrated. But in most games, there's something called a reset point or a checkpoint. When you mess up, you don't have to start the whole game over from the very beginning

—you just go back to the checkpoint. You get another chance.

That's what God offers us. He knows you're going to stumble. He knows there will be times when life doesn't go the way you hoped. But through Jesus, He gives you the chance to start over. Not just once, but again and again. His love is constant. His forgiveness is real. And through the Holy Spirit, you actually have the power to change—to break free from the things that hold you back and to step into the person you were created to be.

This book is about that journey. It's not about being perfect. It's about learning how to begin again with God's help. I'll share a story that might sound a lot like yours—not in the exact details, but in the feelings, the struggles, and the questions. And at the end of each chapter, I'll give you some things to think about, talk about, and try out in real life.

My hope is that as you read, you'll realize you don't have to carry your struggles alone. You don't have to stay stuck in shame. You don't have to pretend. You can be honest. You can change. You can live with hope. And you can start over.

A Prayer to Begin the Journey

God,

You know me better than anyone. You see the parts of my life I keep hidden, the mistakes I've made, and the stuff I don't even want to admit to myself. You also see my dreams, my struggles, and how much I want to be free.

I don't always know how to change, but I want to. I don't want to stay stuck. I want to start over with You.

Be with me as I read this book. Give me courage to be honest, strength to take the next step, and faith to believe You're right here with me. Thank You for loving me as I am, and for never leaving me.

Help me trust that with You, I can always begin again.

Amen.

Overview of the 7 Steps to Starting Over (Teen Edition)

Starting over with God doesn't happen all at once. It's more like a journey you take step by step. Each step builds on the one before it, leading you from honesty, to healing, to living with new strength—and finally to helping others do the same.

Here's your roadmap:

Step 1: Facing the Edge – The Glitch Screen

Life freezes sometimes—like a game that locks up no matter what buttons you push. That's what guilt, shame, and regret feel like. The first step is admitting you're stuck. God isn't afraid of your glitch screen. He meets you there.

Key Idea: You can't fix what you won't face.

Step 2: Taking the First Step – Calling in a Teammate

No one wins playing solo. Life is the same way—you can't carry everything by yourself. Taking the first step means being real with a trusted friend, mentor, or leader and asking for help.

Key Idea: You don't have to do this alone.

Step 3: Unwinding the Old Patterns – Breaking the Bad Streak

Everyone knows what it's like to be in a slump—whether it's missing shots, failing tests, or falling into the same mistakes. To break the streak, you've got to change your approach. Healing requires replacing old patterns with better ones.

Key Idea: New habits make new life possible.

Step 4: Choosing Presence – Putting the Phone Down

Distractions are everywhere—texts, TikTok, Netflix, games. Choosing presence means showing up fully for the people in front of you. Healing happens

when you lean into real relationships instead of checking out.

Key Idea: Connection matters more than distraction.

Step 5: Starting Right – Your Morning Playlist

The first track sets the tone for the whole playlist. Mornings do the same thing for your day. If you start with stress or chaos, the day feels off. But if you start with God—through Scripture, prayer, or music—you step into the day grounded in Him.

Key Idea: Begin with God, and let Him set the rhythm of your day.

Step 6: Living the Daily Grind – Training for the Season

Growth doesn't happen overnight. Athletes train every day to get better. Following Jesus is the same. Daily faithfulness—not quick fixes—leads to transformation. Gratitude keeps your heart awake and your focus on God.

Key Idea: Transformation is about surrender, not willpower.

Step 7: Inviting Others to Begin Again – Sharing the Playlist

When you find a song you love, you share it. God's grace works the same way. Your story of starting over isn't just for you—it's meant to give hope to others who feel stuck.

Key Idea: God's work in you becomes hope for someone else.

Whether you're stuck at the glitch screen, trying to break the bad streak, or ready to share your playlist of hope, remember this: God has never left you. Through Jesus, you always have the power to start over.

Step 1: Facing the Edge

The Glitch Screen

The Story

Steve stared at his phone screen, scrolling mindlessly, but nothing could distract him from the ache in his chest. A text from Grace still sat there, unread even though he had already seen the preview light up.

“I hope your practice goes well. Can’t wait to see you tomorrow. Miss you.”

It should have made him smile. Instead, it stung. Her words were kind, but they only reminded him how far away he felt from her. She thought everything between them was fine. What she didn’t know was that he was slipping—pulling back from her, from his friends, even from God.

On the outside, no one could tell. He still laughed in the hallways at school, showed up to practice, and liked posts online. But when the lights went out at night, he couldn’t escape the thoughts: You’re not

good enough. You're messing everything up. She wouldn't stay with you if she really knew you.

It felt like a glitch screen in a video game. Everything froze. He was stuck. No matter what he tried—ignoring it, distracting himself, pretending—nothing fixed it. He couldn't go forward until he admitted the glitch was real.

For the first time, Steve whispered the truth to himself: "I can't keep living like this."

And that's when it happened. In the silence, he sensed something he hadn't in a long time. A voice—not loud, but steady, almost familiar. "You can start over."

The idea scared him, but it also gave him a flicker of hope. Maybe he wasn't stuck forever. Maybe there was a way forward.

What to Know

Every teenager has glitch-screen moments. For you, it might be drama with friends, pressure from grades, the secret things you hide from your parents, or the endless comparison game online. You feel

stuck. You try to act fine, but inside, it's not fine at all.

The first step to starting over is honesty. You can't fix what you won't face. Most of us would rather hide—behind humor, achievements, or a perfect-looking feed—than admit the truth. But God doesn't ask you to fake it. He invites you to be real.

The Bible promises, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). That means when you feel the most broken, God isn't walking away. He's leaning in. He's not scared of your mess. He meets you right there.

Shame whispers, “If people really knew you, they'd leave.” But God says, “I know you completely, and I love you anyway.” Honesty isn't weakness—it's courage. And it's the very first step toward starting over.

Discussion and Reflection

- What does your “glitch screen” look like right now? Where do you feel frozen or stuck in life?

- If people could see the “real you,” what’s one thing they might be surprised to learn?
- Why do you think it feels easier to hide behind your phone, your grades, or your image instead of being honest?
- How does it make you feel to know Psalm 34:18 says God is closest to you when you feel most broken?
- Who is one safe person in your life you could begin to be real with about your struggles?

Reset Action

This week, take 10–15 minutes to be completely honest. Grab a journal, a note app, or even a voice memo on your phone. Write or speak out the things that feel heavy, broken, or stuck in your life. Don’t filter it. Don’t make it sound spiritual. Just be real.

When you finish, pray a simple prayer:

“God, here’s where I’m stuck. Please meet me here. Show me how to start over.”

That honest step is the beginning of your reset.

Step 2: Taking the First Step –

Calling in a Teammate

The Story

Steve had been carrying the weight of his struggles alone. He wanted to tell Grace the truth about how lost he felt, but the thought terrified him. What if she pulled away? What if she looked at him differently? So he stayed silent.

One Friday night, Steve found himself at a coffee shop after practice, earbuds in, trying to drown out the noise in his head. Then the bell above the door jingled, and Bryan walked in. Bryan had been his best friend since middle school—the guy who always seemed chill, confident, unshakable.

Bryan spotted him and walked over. “Dude, you look wrecked.”

Steve laughed, but it was hollow. “That’s because I feel wrecked.”

Something about Bryan's tone—straightforward but not judgmental—opened the floodgates. Steve admitted what he hadn't told anyone: how stuck he felt, how fake he thought he was, how he worried he was letting Grace down. His voice cracked when he said, "I don't even know who I am anymore."

He braced himself for Bryan to roll his eyes or tell him to man up. Instead, Bryan looked down at the floor, then back at Steve with tears in his eyes.

"Honestly... I've been struggling too. Bad. I've been making choices I'm not proud of, and I don't know how to stop."

Steve froze. Bryan—the strong one, the steady one—was falling apart too. Different struggles, same emptiness.

For the first time in a long time, neither of them pretended. Two friends, side by side, admitting they couldn't handle life on their own. That night, they agreed on one thing: it was time to take the first step. They couldn't do it alone anymore.

What to Know

The first step to starting over is letting someone else in.

Think about sports—you don't win championships playing solo. Even in video games, you often need a squad or a co-op partner. Life works the same way. When you try to carry everything alone, you eventually collapse under the weight. But when you open up, you find strength in connection.

The Bible says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Notice that healing isn't just about you and God. It's about honesty with others too. God wired us for community.

Shame tries to convince you that you have to figure it all out by yourself—that if anyone knew the truth, they'd walk away. But often, when you take the risk of being real, you discover other people are fighting battles too. Your honesty could even give them courage to open up.

Taking the first step doesn't mean you have to share everything with everyone. It just means being brave enough to let one safe person in. That single step can be the start of healing.

Discussion and Reflection

- Why do you think it feels so scary to admit your struggles to someone else?
- Who are the “teammates” in your life—friends, mentors, parents, youth leaders—you know would listen without judgment?
- Has anyone ever been honest with you about something they were struggling with? How did that change the way you saw them?
- James 5:16 says confession and prayer lead to healing. Why do you think God uses relationships to help us heal instead of just letting us keep everything private?
- What’s one small way you could be more real with a trusted person this week?

Reset Action

Pick one person you trust—a close friend, a mentor, or a youth leader—and take the risk of being real. You don’t have to spill your whole life story. Just share one thing you’ve been carrying. You could say something as simple as, “Hey, I’ve been struggling

lately, and I don't know what to do. Can we talk?"
Then ask them to pray for you.

That's your first step toward starting over.

Step 3: Unwinding the Old Patterns – Breaking the Bad Streak

The Story

After talking with Bryan, Steve finally felt a little lighter. For the first time, he wasn't pretending. But the next week, he noticed something frustrating—his habits hadn't changed.

Every day looked the same. School, practice, home, crash on the couch, phone in hand until late at night. He'd scroll TikTok, binge YouTube, zone out on a game, and then wonder why nothing in his life felt different.

Even though he had admitted the truth, Steve realized he was still stuck in the same old patterns. It was like being on a losing streak in basketball—missing shot after shot, game after game. Once you're in the streak, it's almost like your brain expects failure. And until you change something, the streak continues.

One morning before school, Steve sat in his car staring at the steering wheel. He thought about the counseling sessions he and Bryan had started, the way Grace kept asking if he was okay, and how nothing seemed to actually shift. His chest felt tight. I'm trying, but I still feel stuck.

That day, he finally made an appointment with Brandon, his youth pastor. Sitting across from him in the church office, Steve unloaded the same frustrations he had been carrying. Brandon listened carefully, then asked a simple question:

“What do you do when you get home each night?”

Steve shrugged. “I crash in my chair. Scroll. Maybe eat dinner with Grace’s family if I’m over there. But mostly, I just zone out.”

Brandon nodded. “And how does that shape your relationships?”

Steve frowned. He had never thought about it like that. Brandon explained: “Every choice you make—even the small ones—either moves you closer to the people who matter, or farther away. Patterns are powerful. They don’t just happen to you—you create them. And if you want change, you’ve got to break the bad streak.”

For the first time, Steve realized healing wasn't just about being honest with his struggles. It was also about making different choices.

What to Know

Admitting you're struggling is important, but if you keep living in the same patterns, nothing really changes.

Think about a losing streak in sports or a bad streak in gaming. If you keep doing the same moves, you'll keep losing. To break the streak, you've got to change your approach.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The world's pattern is escape—numbing out with phones, streaming, or distractions. God's invitation is renewal—making intentional choices that help you grow.

Unwinding old patterns takes effort. It means replacing the habits that drain you with habits that bring life. It won't always feel natural at first, but over time, small choices can open the door to transformation.

Discussion and Reflection

- What's your go-to habit when you feel stressed, bored, or overwhelmed (scrolling, gaming, isolating, etc.)? Does it help or just distract you?
- Can you think of a time when a “bad streak” in your life—sports, school, relationships—only ended because you changed something?
- Romans 12:2 says not to conform to the world's patterns. What patterns do you see around you that pull people away from God?
- What's one small evening habit that could actually draw you closer to the people who matter?
- Why do you think it feels easier to stay in old habits, even when they make life worse?

Reset Action

This week, pick one evening and do something different on purpose. Instead of crashing into your old routine, choose connection. Eat dinner at the table with your family. Call a friend and actually

talk. Ask your Grace (or another close friend) about their day without distractions. Or if you're alone, journal or spend 10 minutes in Scripture.

Breaking the bad streak starts with one new choice.

Step 4: Choosing Presence – Putting the Phone Down

The Story

The first night Steve tried breaking the streak, it felt awkward. He walked into Grace's kitchen and instead of pulling out his phone, he asked, "Need help with dinner?"

Grace looked up, surprised. "Uh... sure." She handed him a cutting board and some vegetables.

Steve had no idea what he was doing, but he stuck with it. As they chopped and stirred, the silence between them didn't feel as heavy as usual. Grace even laughed when he accidentally dropped half the peppers on the floor. For the first time in weeks, it felt like they were really together.

Later that night, instead of scrolling side by side on the couch, they sat at the table and actually ate. It wasn't deep conversation, but Steve noticed something—Grace's shoulders seemed more

relaxed. She smiled more. She asked him how practice went, and this time, he actually answered.

The next evening, he almost slipped back into his old pattern. His phone buzzed, the couch called his name, and part of him wanted to check out. But he remembered what Brandon had said: “Every choice either moves you closer or farther.” So he stayed present.

One night at a time, Steve started realizing something huge: presence mattered more than perfection. Just showing up with his attention and his heart was already making a difference.

What to Know

We live in a world of constant distraction. Phones buzz. Notifications ping. There’s always another video, another DM, another scroll. It’s easy to be with people but not really present.

But presence is powerful. It communicates love without words. It builds trust. It heals distance. When you choose presence, you’re saying, “You matter more than my distractions.”

Galatians 6:2 says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Sometimes carrying someone’s burden doesn’t mean solving their problems—it means showing up.

Listening. Paying attention. Being present.

When you choose presence, you reflect the heart of Jesus. He didn’t stay distant from people’s pain—He entered into it. Presence was His ministry. And it can be yours too.

Discussion and Reflection

- Think about your own relationships—friends, family, or dating. What are the biggest distractions that keep you from being truly present?
- How does it feel when someone gives you their full attention without being glued to their phone?
- Why do you think presence (just being there) can be more powerful than trying to “fix” someone’s problems?

- Galatians 6:2 talks about carrying each other's burdens. Who in your life might need your presence this week?
- If you're honest, are you usually more present with your phone or with the people around you?

Reset Action

Pick one night this week to put your phone down and be fully present with someone. If you're with family, eat dinner together at the table without devices. If you're with friends, have a real conversation without distractions. If you're with your Grace (or another close friend), give them your full attention—ask questions and listen. End the night with a simple prayer of thanks for the time together.

Presence builds connection, one choice at a time.

Step 5: Starting Right – Your Morning Playlist

The Story

Things between Steve and Grace were getting better. They were laughing more, spending more time together, and the tension that once felt unbearable was slowly fading. Steve even felt lighter around his friends.

But one afternoon, sitting in Brandon's office, his youth pastor looked him in the eye and asked, "Steve, are you happy with yourself?"

Steve hesitated. "I mean... yeah, things are better. Grace and I are good. I'm making changes."

Brandon shook his head gently. "I didn't ask about your relationship. I asked about you."

Steve's stomach dropped. He realized that while his evenings were different, his mornings were still a mess. He stayed up too late scrolling, hit snooze three times, rushed out the door, and started the day in chaos. By first period, he was already running on empty.

Brandon leaned back in his chair. “Steve, the way you start your day sets the tone for everything that follows. It’s like your morning playlist—if the first track is chaos, the whole vibe of the day is off. But if you start with God, the whole day has a different rhythm.”

Steve thought about it. He always played music to get pumped for practice. What if he gave God those first minutes the same way he gave his warmup playlist?

That night, Steve set his Bible on his nightstand and charged his phone across the room so he wouldn’t grab it first thing. The next morning, before touching anything else, he opened to Psalm 5:3: “In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.”

It felt different. Peaceful. Like the whole day was already on a new track.

What to Know

How you start your day matters. It’s like the playlist that sets the mood—if you start with stress, distraction, or negativity, it shapes everything. But if

you start with God, you remember who you are and whose you are before the world tries to tell you otherwise.

Spending even five minutes with God in the morning—reading a Psalm, saying a short prayer, or listening to worship music—can re-center your heart. It's not about checking a box or being super spiritual. It's about setting the tone for the rest of your day.

Psalm 5:3 shows us that mornings are sacred space: a chance to talk to God and wait expectantly for Him to move. Starting right doesn't mean your day will be perfect, but it does mean you'll face it grounded in His love instead of running on empty.

Discussion and Reflection

- Be honest: what's the first thing you usually reach for in the morning—your phone, food, or something else?
- How does your current morning routine affect the way your day goes?

- What would it look like to “give God your playlist” in the morning—through Scripture, prayer, or music?
- Psalm 5:3 says the psalmist prayed and waited expectantly. What might it look like for you to begin your day expecting God to show up?
- Why do you think mornings feel harder to give to God than nights?

Reset Action

This week, commit to giving God the first five minutes of your morning. Before you check your phone, open a Psalm (try Psalm 1, Psalm 23, or Psalm 46). Read it slowly. Pray a short prayer like, “God, guide me today.” Then carry one word or verse with you throughout the day.

Your morning playlist will shape your day—so let God set the tone first.

Step 6: Living the Daily Grind –

Training for the Season

The Story

Steve's mornings started to feel different. Reading a Psalm, praying a short prayer, even just pausing before the chaos of the day—it gave him a sense of peace he hadn't felt before. Grace noticed it too.

“You're more chill lately,” she said one afternoon as they walked to class together. “It's like... you're not carrying the same weight you used to.”

Steve smiled. “Yeah, I guess I've been trying to start my days better.”

But a few weeks later, Steve started to feel something shift. The routines were good, but he caught himself thinking, As long as I do this, I'll be fine. He was treating the habits like magic tricks—check the box, stay good.

At his next conversation with Brandon, he admitted it. “I like my new routines, but honestly... it feels like I’m just going through the motions.”

Brandon nodded. “That’s normal. But Steve, remember—your habits aren’t the source of your strength. God is. The routines matter, but they’re not the goal. They’re just ways to stay connected to Him.”

Steve thought about it like sports. You can’t just practice one drill and think it’ll win you the whole season. Training matters, but what matters more is the heart you bring into the game.

Brandon added, “Want to keep your heart awake? Practice gratitude. Pay attention to the small things you can thank God for each day. Gratitude keeps you focused on Him, not just the routine.”

That night, Steve tried it. He thanked God for Grace’s laughter, for his teammates, and even for the weird pink sunset outside his window. It felt simple—but it shifted his focus. The daily grind wasn’t about willpower. It was about worship.

What to Know

Spiritual growth isn't about one emotional high or one big camp experience. It's about small, daily choices that keep you connected to God—like training for a season, not just a single game.

But here's the catch: if you make the habits the point, you'll eventually burn out. Reading your Bible, praying, or journaling are good, but they're not the finish line—they're the connection point to the God who sustains you.

Philippians 4:6–7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Gratitude is the key. It shifts your eyes from your stress to the God who is already working.

Transformation is not about control—it's about surrender. Not about holding everything together, but about letting God hold you.

Discussion and Reflection

- When do your routines feel more like “checklists” than ways to connect with God?
- How is growing in faith similar to training for a sport or practicing an instrument?
- Philippians 4:6–7 connects peace with thanksgiving. Why do you think gratitude changes so much in your mindset?
- What are three things you could thank God for today—big or small?
- How does surrender (trusting God) feel different from just trying harder?

Reset Action

Each night this week, write down three things you're thankful for. They can be simple—a good meal, a funny text, a moment of peace. Then end your day by thanking God for those things. Share one of them with a friend or family member. Gratitude shifts your focus and helps you live with peace in the daily grind.

Step 7: Inviting Others to Begin Again – Sharing the Playlist

The Story

Steve was grabbing lunch at the student union when he noticed Bryan sitting alone at a corner table. His hoodie was pulled tight over his head, his eyes glued to the floor.

Steve slid into the chair across from him. “Hey, man. You good?”

Bryan shrugged, avoiding eye contact. After a long pause, his voice cracked. “Not really. I’ve messed up again. I don’t even know who I am anymore. Feels like everything I touch falls apart.”

Steve’s first instinct was to try to cheer him up. But instead, he remembered what had helped him most—not quick fixes, but honesty. So he listened. He let Bryan spill everything.

Finally, Bryan looked up, desperate. “I don’t get it, Steve. You’re different lately. You’re not as heavy. You seem... free. What changed?”

Steve swallowed hard. This was the moment. He told Bryan the truth. Not a perfect story, but a real one—about hitting his own glitch screen, opening up to Grace and Brandon, building new habits, and learning to start his days with God. He admitted it wasn’t always easy, but God had been there the whole time, and it changed everything.

Bryan leaned back, processing. For the first time in weeks, Steve saw a flicker of hope in his eyes.

“Maybe I need that too,” Bryan said quietly.

Steve nodded. “You don’t have to figure it out alone. I’ll walk with you.”

It hit Steve right then—starting over wasn’t just about his story. It was about helping others realize they could start over too.

What to Know

When God works in your life, it’s never just for you. His grace is meant to ripple outward.

Think about your favorite new song or playlist. When you find something that hits, what's the first thing you do? You share it. Why? Because you want others to experience it too.

That's how it is with God's grace. When you've experienced His love and healing, you can't keep it to yourself. Someone else needs to know they're not alone. Someone else needs to see that change is possible.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Your story of starting over becomes proof of that verse for someone else. You don't have to preach a sermon. Just be honest. Just be present. Just point people to the God who gave you a new beginning.

Your story could be the very thing that gives a friend the courage to believe they can start over too.

Discussion and Reflection

- Who in your life reminds you of Bryan—someone who feels stuck or weighed down?

- Why do you think it's hard to share your struggles and your story with others?
- Think of a time when someone else's honesty gave you hope. How did it impact you?
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 says if you're in Christ, you are a new creation. How does your story reflect that truth?
- What would it look like for you to walk with someone else as they start over?

Reset Action

This week, pray and ask God to show you one friend who might be struggling. Reach out to them—not with advice, but with honesty and presence. Ask, “How are you really doing?” Be willing to listen. And if the opportunity comes, share one part of your own story of God's grace.

Your story might be the playlist of hope someone else has been waiting to hear.

A Prayer to Continue the Journey

God,

Thank You for walking with me through this journey. From the moments when I felt stuck at the glitch screen, to the times when I learned to break bad streaks and choose presence, You were always there.

Thank You for reminding me that I don't have to do life alone, that I can call in teammates, and that You've placed people in my life who care. Thank You for teaching me to start my days with You, to live with gratitude in the daily grind, and to share my story so others can begin again too.

Lord, I know I won't always get it right. There will be days I fall back into old habits or feel like giving up. But remind me that Your grace is new every morning. Help me to remember that because of Jesus, I always have the chance to start over.

Fill me with Your Spirit so I can live as the person You made me to be. Give me courage to be honest,

boldness to share my story, and love to walk with others who need hope.

Thank You, God, for never leaving me and for making me new.

Amen.

Appendix: Teen Small Group Leader's Guide: Starting Over

Overview:

This 7-session guide follows the steps in Starting Over (Teen Edition). Each session includes:

- Icebreaker – fun way to engage teens
- Story Recap – short reminder of Steve's journey
- Discussion – based on the book's questions
- Practice/Activity – hands-on or real-life challenge
- Prayer – close each week with prayer

Week 1 – Facing the Edge (The Glitch Screen)

Theme: Honesty is the first step to freedom.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18

- Icebreaker: “Glitch Stories” – ask everyone to share the funniest or most frustrating time tech failed them (a frozen phone, gaming glitch, etc.).
- Story Recap: Steve feels stuck and admits he can’t keep pretending.
- Discussion: Why do we hide instead of being honest? What are our “glitch screens”?
- Activity: Give students index cards. Have them write one thing (just a word or symbol) that represents something heavy or stuck in their life. Fold it, place in a basket. Pray over them collectively (no names shared).
- Prayer: Pray for courage to be honest with God and with safe people.

Week 2 – Taking the First Step (Calling in a Teammate)

Theme: Vulnerability opens the door to healing.

Scripture: James 5:16

- Icebreaker: “Squad Goals” – ask: who would you call first if you got stranded? Why?
- Story Recap: Steve finally opens up to Bryan, and Bryan admits his own struggles.
- Discussion: Why is it scary to admit we’re struggling? What makes a person safe to talk to?
- Activity: “Team Circle” – sit in a circle and pass a ball. Each person shares one safe person in their life they could talk to if needed. If they can’t think of one, encourage them to choose someone this week.
- Prayer: Ask God to give each student a safe teammate to lean on.

Week 3 – Unwinding the Old Patterns (Breaking the Bad Streak)

Theme: New habits break old cycles.

Scripture: Romans 12:2

- Icebreaker: “Streaks” – ask: what’s the longest streak you’ve had on Snapchat, Duolingo, or another app?
- Story Recap: Steve realizes zoning out each night is creating distance, not healing.
- Discussion: What are the habits that keep us stuck? What small changes could help?
- Activity: On paper, draw two columns: “Habits that drain me” vs. “Habits that help me.” Share (voluntarily) one from each.
- Prayer: Ask God for strength to break one draining habit this week.

Week 4 – Choosing Presence (Putting the Phone Down)

Theme: Presence builds connection.

Scripture: Galatians 6:2

- Icebreaker: “Phoney” – challenge everyone to put their phone in the middle of the table for 5 minutes. See how weird it feels.

- Story Recap: Steve puts down his phone and chooses to be present with Grace.
- Discussion: How does distraction keep us from real relationships? What does true presence look like?
- Activity: “Unplug Challenge” – challenge students to spend one meal this week without phones. Share what it was like next session.
- Prayer: Pray for focus, presence, and deeper connections.

Week 5 – Starting Right (Your Morning Playlist)

Theme: Mornings set the tone for the day.

Scripture: Psalm 5:3

- Icebreaker: “Playlist Swap” – have students share their favorite hype song to start the day.
- Story Recap: Steve learns to give God the first minutes of his day.

- Discussion: What's the first thing you usually do when you wake up? How does it shape your day?
- Activity: Provide cards with short Psalms (Psalm 1, 23, 46). Encourage each student to read one in the morning this week and write down one word that stood out.
- Prayer: Pray for God to set the tone for each student's mornings.

Week 6 – Living the Daily Grind (Training for the Season)

Theme: Gratitude keeps our hearts awake.

Scripture: Philippians 4:6–7

- Icebreaker: “Daily Grind” – ask: what's the most boring routine you do every day?
- Story Recap: Steve learns not to cling to habits but to the God behind them.
- Discussion: How is faith like training for a sport or practicing music? Why does gratitude change our outlook?

- Activity: “Gratitude Board” – give sticky notes, have each student write 3 things they’re thankful for. Stick them all on the wall to build a collage of gratitude.
- Prayer: Thank God aloud for specific blessings shared by the group.

Week 7 – Inviting Others to Begin Again (Sharing the Playlist)

Theme: Your story can give hope to others.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

- Icebreaker: “Share the Song” – ask: what’s a song, show, or trend you’ve shared with a friend recently?
- Story Recap: Steve shares his story with Bryan, giving him hope to start again.
- Discussion: Who do you know that needs hope right now? What holds you back from sharing your story?

- Activity: Each student writes down one person they will pray for this week who may need encouragement or hope. Encourage follow-up conversations.
- Prayer: Commission the group—pray over each student by name, asking God to use their stories to bring hope to others.

About the Author

Ryan Stratton is an ordained elder in the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, where he has dedicated his life to helping people discover the hope, purpose, and transformation found in Jesus Christ.

For more than twenty-five years, Ryan has been teaching and mentoring children, teenagers, and adults. His journey as a teacher began in his teenage years through the discipline of TaeKwonDo, which he practiced and taught for fifteen years. That season of training instilled in him a passion for discipline, perseverance, and personal growth—values that continue to shape his ministry today.

After responding to God's call to Christian ministry, Ryan entered full-time vocational service, beginning with youth ministry before stepping into the role of pastor. His deepest priority is to guide people toward life beyond themselves and into the greater purpose God has designed for them.

Ryan holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Stephen F. Austin State University and a Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary.

At the center of Ryan's life are his wife and their four children, who remain his greatest joy and most important calling. When he is not leading his congregation, studying Scripture, preaching, or writing (revryanstratton.com), you can find him serving in the community, participating in local outreach, or simply enjoying time with his family.