

THE POWER TO START OVER

**A STEP-BY-STEP
JOURNEY TO
HEALING,
TRANSFORMATION,
AND LASTING HOPE
IN CHRIST**

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I dedicate this book to all who are looking for a way to start over and live life with the wholeness and holiness God offers through Jesus Christ.

May you find the peace Christ offers and the strength to be made new with the Holy Spirit.

*Starting over is not about erasing your story, but
letting God redeem it and write the next chapter
with you.*

Introduction: Why This Book Matters

Life rarely turns out the way we expect. There are seasons when we stumble, when the weight of shame or regret leaves us feeling like our story is beyond repair. We put on brave faces in public while privately carrying fears, addictions, disappointments, or doubts. And even when no one else can see it, we know the truth—we are not living the life God created us to live.

As a pastor, I have walked alongside countless people who feel stuck in that very place. I have seen the tears in hospital rooms, the brokenness in counseling sessions, and the quiet desperation of men and women who believed they had no hope left. I have sat across from husbands and wives trying to piece together a marriage, parents wondering if they are failing their children, and individuals wrestling with guilt, addiction, or loneliness they never thought they'd face.

Again and again, I have seen how powerful it is when someone takes the first step toward honesty. When they admit where they are and dare to believe that God is not finished with them, something shifts. Light begins to break through the cracks.

This book is a culmination of years of observation, study, counseling, and personal experience. But more than that, it is born out of a deep desire to see people encounter the transforming power and presence of the living God. The God who created you loves you more than you can imagine. He does not desire for you to live bound by shame or regret. He desires for you to become the person He made you to be—and, through His Spirit, to become even more than you ever thought possible.

The truth of the gospel is this: Jesus has never left you, and He never will. He has promised, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Even in the moments when you feel most alone, He is near. Even when you have wandered, His presence has not departed. And because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, you are not only invited to start over—you are empowered to start over.

The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in you (Romans 8:11). That means the power that conquered sin and death is the very power that can breathe new life into your weary soul, restore what has been broken, and lead you into a future filled with hope.

This book is not a formula. It is a pathway. Each step builds on the one before it, moving you from

honesty, to presence, to transformation, to the joy of helping others discover the same grace. My prayer is that as you walk through these pages, you will find courage to be honest, strength to take the next step, and faith to believe that God is already at work in your life.

Before you begin, let's start where all true transformation begins: in prayer.

Opening Prayer for the Journey

Gracious God,

I come to You as I am. You see the parts of my life that I hide from others—the shame, the doubts, the fears, and the wounds that still ache. Yet You also see my longing to be made whole.

Thank You for never leaving me or forsaking me. Thank You that through the presence of Your Holy Spirit, I have the power to start over—not in my strength, but in Yours.

As I walk through this book, meet me here. Give me courage to be honest about where I am. Give me faith to believe that change is possible. Give me strength to take the steps You place before me.

Lord, write a new story in me. Transform what is broken. Heal what is wounded. Restore what has

been lost. And teach me to live in Your grace, day by day.

I trust You, Jesus—the One who makes all things new.

Amen.

Overview of the Steps

Starting over does not happen all at once. It unfolds one step at a time. Each step builds on the one before, leading you deeper into honesty, healing, and transformation. These seven steps are not a formula to fix your life, but a pathway to walk with God as He makes you new.

Here is the roadmap for the journey ahead:

Step 1: Facing the Edge

Every transformation begins with honesty. We cannot heal what we refuse to name. In this first step, we face the truth of our brokenness and trust that God meets us in the places we feel most crushed and alone.

Step 2: Taking the First Step

Honesty opens the door, but we must take a step forward. This means risking vulnerability—sharing our struggles with others and admitting we need help. When we confess and seek support, the chains of shame begin to break.

Step 3: Unwinding the Old Patterns

Awareness is not enough. We must identify the daily habits that keep us stuck and begin to

unwind them. Healing requires small, intentional changes in the way we live, especially in the ordinary moments of life.

Step 4: Choosing Presence

True transformation is found not in dramatic gestures but in simple, daily choices to show up for God and for others. Presence - our willingness to be fully available - creates the space where trust and healing grow.

Step 5: Starting Right

Evenings shape how we rest, but mornings shape how we live. This step calls us to begin each day with God - through Scripture, prayer, and gratitude - so that we are grounded in His love before anything else demands our attention.

Step 6: Living the Daily Grind

Transformation is sustained not by willpower, but by surrender. In this step, we learn to keep our focus on God rather than on our habits, cultivating gratitude that shifts our eyes from ourselves to the Giver of every good thing.

Step 7: Inviting Others to Begin Again

Starting over is never just for us. The grace we receive is meant to be shared. In the final step, we

discover that our healing becomes a testimony to others, and we are called to walk with them as they begin their own journey.

Wherever you are right now - whether standing at the edge, stuck in old patterns, or longing for renewal - these steps are an invitation. Take them one at a time. Be honest. Be patient. And trust that God is already walking with you.

Step 1: Facing the Edge

The Story

The shot glass of whiskey trembled in Steve's hand. The amber liquid caught the dim light of the bar, but he hadn't touched it. His throat burned with a different ache - one that no drink could numb. His eyes stayed locked on the note lying in front of him. The edges were smudged from the tears that had fallen onto it.

It was from Grace. His wife. "I love you, honey. I hope your trip goes well. I'll miss you until you return home."

That last line twisted in his chest. Home. He muttered the word under his breath, almost spitting it out. When was the last time he had actually felt at home? Home was supposed to be a place of peace, a refuge when the world pressed in. But lately, home felt like the loneliest place of all.

He loved Grace - at least he thought he did - but somewhere along the way the warmth between them had cooled. Their conversations had grown shallow. Their laughter had disappeared. They still lived under the same roof, but it felt like they were roommates more than husband and wife. He

had no single moment to point to, no one fight that broke them. Instead, it had been a slow erosion, like water wearing down rock, leaving cracks that now seemed impossible to repair.

Steve closed his eyes, and for a brief moment he saw the memories that haunted him. Grace walking down the aisle on their wedding day, her eyes shining with joy. Their honeymoon, filled with laughter and promises whispered in the dark. He remembered the nights when they couldn't wait to be in each other's presence, when even the simplest gestures - a note tucked in his lunch, a kiss before leaving for work - felt sacred.

Now those memories only made the silence between them louder. What had once been acts of love had turned into obligations. What began as joy had dulled into routine. And routine had finally collapsed into distance.

Steve's chest ached with shame. He wondered if Grace still loved him or if she simply loved the version of him she had married years ago. Maybe the man she once admired was gone. Maybe he had become a stranger in his own marriage.

He picked up the glass and set it down again, untouched. The truth was, the drink wouldn't help. The ache wasn't from one mistake or one failure. It was the weight of years of unspoken

disappointment, unmet expectations, and unhealed wounds. It was the burden of trying to carry everything alone while putting on a brave face for the world.

His hand shook as he buried his face into his palms. For the first time in a long time, he let the tears fall freely. He whispered the words he had been afraid to say out loud: “I can’t keep living like this. I don’t even know who I am anymore.”

And then it happened. In the stillness of that dimly lit bar, through the heaviness of his grief, he sensed something unexpected. A voice, not loud, but steady. Not condemning, but clear.

“You need to start over.”

The words startled him, yet they settled deep in his soul. Start over? The thought terrified him, but it also sparked something he hadn’t felt in years. Hope.

The Pastor’s Takeaway

Starting over begins with honesty. There is no way around it. You cannot heal what you refuse to name, and you cannot fix what you will not face. Steve’s story at the bar is not unique. Many of us reach that moment when the weight of silence,

failure, or shame finally feels heavier than the fear of admitting the truth.

Shame thrives in the dark. It tells us to keep our struggles hidden, to pretend everything is fine, to maintain the image that we are strong enough to handle it on our own. But that silence is a prison. And the longer we stay in it, the deeper the chains dig in.

God meets us right there, not when we have it all figured out, but when we are crushed under the weight of it. That is why the psalmist declares with confidence, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). God does not turn away from our brokenness. He leans in. He draws near. His presence is not repelled by our mess. It is drawn to it.

Think about that. The moments you feel weakest may be the very moments when God is standing closest. Where we see failure, God sees an open door for grace. Where we see disappointment, God sees the soil where new life can take root. Where we see the end, God sees the beginning of something new.

To face the truth is frightening, but it is also freeing. When you admit you cannot keep living the way you are, you are finally in a place where

God can begin to work. Starting over is not about erasing the past. It is about letting God redeem it. The pain you carry, the struggles you hide, the shame that whispers “you are not enough” - all of these can become places where God’s power and presence shine through.

Honesty with God is not the end of your story. It is the very first step toward freedom.

Discussion and Reflection

- Have you ever felt weighed down by guilt or shame and did not know who you could talk to about it? What kept you silent?
- When you look at your life, where do you feel like Steve - sitting at the edge, knowing something has to change but unsure where to begin?
- How does shame convince us that we are alone in our struggle?
- Think about the people God has placed in your life. Who around you seems to carry a peace or strength you long for? How might God be using their presence to show you a different way forward?

- Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.” How have you seen God draw close to someone who was hurting? How might that give you hope for your own journey?
- What would it look like for you to take one step out of hiding and toward honesty this week—with God, with a trusted friend, or with yourself?

Practical Application

Set aside 15 minutes this week with a journal or a blank sheet of paper. Write down the truths you have been hiding, the struggles you rarely admit even to yourself. Do not edit or polish your words. Simply be honest. Afterward, pray over what you wrote, asking God to meet you right there. If you feel safe, share one part of that truth with a trusted friend or mentor. Naming it is the first step toward starting over.

Step 2: Taking the First Step

The Story

For months, Steve had carried his pain alone. He wore his mask well - smiles at work, polite conversations at church, the occasional laugh when someone cracked a joke - but inside, he was unraveling. Every night when the lights went out, he lay awake with questions pressing in like a weight on his chest: Does Grace still love me? Do I even know who I am anymore? How did I drift so far from God, from my marriage, from myself?

He wanted to reach for the phone, to call Grace, to pour out the emptiness he was drowning in. His thumb hovered over her name, but fear froze him. What if she cried? What if she grew angry? What if she told him it was already too late? Silence felt safer, even if it was killing him inside.

Then, as if on cue, the door of the bar creaked open.

Bryan walked in. His oldest friend. Solid, dependable Bryan. The guy who always seemed to have it together. He spotted Steve, slid onto the stool beside him, and spoke with blunt honesty.

“You look like hell.”

Steve let out a broken laugh. “That’s because I feel like it.”

It was the kind of moment that cracked something open. The words started tumbling out. Steve confessed the heaviness he had been hiding. His voice wavered as he admitted, “I don’t even feel like much of a man anymore. Not as a husband. Not as a person. I don’t know how to fix this. I don’t know how to fix me.”

He braced for judgment. Instead, Bryan’s shoulders slumped and his voice grew quiet. “I get it. I feel that way too.”

Then Bryan admitted something Steve never expected. He had been caught up in an affair. He was drowning in guilt, numbing the shame with long hours at work and too many drinks.

Steve sat in stunned silence. Bryan, the man he admired, the friend he thought had it all together - was just as broken as he was. Different struggles, but the same root: shame, emptiness, and the loneliness of pretending.

For the first time in years, they both dropped the mask. Two men sitting side by side, weary of hiding, finally admitted the truth. That night, they agreed on one thing. They couldn’t do this alone.

It was time to seek real help. It was time to take the first step.

The Pastor's Takeaway

The first step to starting over is often the hardest. It is the moment you decide to come out of hiding, to tell the truth, and to admit you cannot carry the weight on your own. Vulnerability feels terrifying because it risks rejection. But it is also the doorway to healing.

James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Notice the connection—confession and prayer with others lead to healing. God did not design us to walk through life in isolation. He created us for community. Healing is not just vertical, between you and God. It is also horizontal, between you and others.

Shame whispers, “If people knew the truth about you, they would walk away.” But the reality is often the opposite. When we dare to be vulnerable, we find that others are struggling too. Our honesty creates room for someone else to open up. That is what happened with Steve and Bryan. One man's courage became another man's invitation.

Taking the first step does not mean fixing everything in one conversation. It does not mean spilling every detail to everyone. It means admitting you need help and choosing to take a small step toward it. That step might be calling a friend, opening up to your spouse, making an appointment with a counselor, or sitting down with a pastor. Whatever it looks like, it is a declaration of faith that says, “I cannot do this alone. I need God’s grace, and I need people to walk with me.”

The first step is uncomfortable. But it is also where the chains of silence begin to break. Honesty opens the door for grace. And grace is what makes starting over possible.

Discussion and Reflection

- When you think about Steve and Bryan’s conversation, what stands out most to you - the honesty, the shared struggle, or the decision to seek help? Why?
- What fears hold you back from admitting your struggles to someone else?
- Have you ever kept silent about something because you were convinced no one else

would understand? What happened when the truth eventually came out?

- James 5:16 promises that confession and prayer bring healing. Why do you think God connects healing with community instead of isolation?
- Who in your life feels “safe” enough for you to share a piece of your struggle with? How might that conversation be a first step for you?

Practical Application

This week, take one step out of isolation. Identify one trusted person - a friend, a spouse, a pastor, or a counselor - and share honestly about something you have been carrying. You do not need to unpack everything. Simply say, “Here is what I am struggling with.” Then ask them to pray with you. That small act of honesty may feel risky, but it is the first step toward freedom.

Step 3: Unwinding the Old Patterns

The Story

Two weeks of counseling had given Steve words for emotions he had buried and space to name wounds he had carried for years. He had begun to untangle anger, grief, and disappointment. He had even traced some of the roots of the distance in his marriage. Yet something inside him still felt restless.

One morning, sitting in his truck before work, Steve gripped the steering wheel and sighed. Counseling had helped him see what was wrong, but he was still unsure of what to do differently. Awareness was good, but it wasn't enough. His patterns were still the same. After work, he came home, collapsed into his recliner, flipped on the TV, and numbed himself until bedtime. His counselor had called it "coping." Steve was beginning to realize it was also avoidance.

That morning, another thought surfaced. Maybe I need to talk to Brandon.

Brandon was his pastor. They shook hands on Sundays, traded small talk in the church lobby,

but Steve had never dared to sit down with him one-on-one. The thought of opening up about his struggles made his chest tighten. Still, he felt the nudge. He couldn't keep circling the same cycle.

So he walked into the church office. The smell of coffee and copier paper filled the air. He nearly turned around when he saw the sign on Brandon's door: Out Visiting the Hospital. For a brief moment, he felt relief. Maybe he wasn't ready after all. But deep down, he knew this conversation couldn't wait forever. He left his number at the desk and asked Brandon to call him.

The next day they sat across from each other in Brandon's office. The door was shut. Steve's palms were sweaty, but something about the pastor's calm presence helped him open up. He poured it all out—the distance with Grace, the shame he carried, the numbness of his evenings. Brandon listened without judgment.

Finally, Brandon leaned forward and asked a simple but piercing question. "Steve, what do you usually do when you get home from work?"

Steve frowned. "I sit in my chair. I turn on the TV. Grace makes dinner. We eat while watching something."

Brandon nodded. “And what does Grace do before you get home?”

Steve hesitated. “I... I don’t really know.”

“Does she know how you’ve been feeling?”

Steve’s eyes dropped. “No. I’ve played the conversation in my head a thousand times, but I never say it. I don’t want to hurt her.”

Brandon was quiet for a moment, then spoke.

“Every evening you make choices. They may feel small, but they’re shaping your marriage. Every decision either draws you closer to Grace and to God, or pushes you further away. Evenings aren’t just downtime. They are the foundation of tomorrow. What you do in those hours is forming the life you are building.”

The words hit Steve hard. He thought about how many nights he had chosen silence over conversation, distraction over connection, distance over presence. Patterns that felt harmless were actually shaping his heart.

Brandon’s voice was gentle but firm. “Steve, it’s time to unwind the old patterns. Instead of checking out, be intentional. Sit with Grace. Share a meal at the table. Ask her about her day. Pray with her. These small choices can open the door to big changes.”

Steve left the office both convicted and hopeful. Maybe healing didn't always come through dramatic breakthroughs. Maybe it began with unwinding the old patterns, one choice at a time.

The Pastor's Takeaway

Awareness is the beginning of transformation, but it is not the end. Many of us can name our struggles, identify the roots of our pain, and even confess them to God or to others. But if our daily patterns remain the same, our lives will not change. Healing requires not only naming what is broken, but also practicing something new.

This is why the rhythms of life matter so deeply. God created rhythms from the beginning of creation—"There was evening, and there was morning" (Genesis 1). Notice the order. Evening came first. The day began with rest, not work. In God's design, what we do with our evenings shapes what follows.

For Steve, evenings had become a place of escape. For many of us, it might be scrolling on our phones, zoning out in front of the TV, or avoiding hard conversations with the people closest to us. But those hours are not neutral. They are forming our hearts, our relationships, and our faith.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). The world’s pattern is distraction and escape. God’s invitation is renewal through presence - presence with Him and with those we love.

Unwinding old patterns takes courage. It requires us to say no to habits that feel easy but empty, and yes to practices that may feel awkward at first but bring life in the long run. This is not about quick fixes. It is about small, intentional steps that open space for God’s Spirit to transform us.

Discussion and Reflection

- What are some of the patterns in your life that you use to “unwind”? Do they draw you closer to God and others, or do they create distance?
- How do small daily choices—like how you spend your evenings—shape your relationships over time?
- Can you think of a time when a small change in your routine brought surprising results?

- Genesis shows us that evening comes before morning. How might your evenings prepare your heart for the day that follows?
- Romans 12:2 calls us not to conform to the world's patterns but to be transformed. What worldly patterns have you conformed to, and what would transformation look like instead?

Practical Application

This week, choose one evening to do something different. Instead of retreating to the TV, phone, or distraction, spend intentional time with someone close to you. Eat a meal at the table. Ask meaningful questions. Share something about your day. If you live alone, use the time to journal, read Scripture, or call a friend. Before bed, take a moment to pray. Ask God to help you unwind not through escape, but through His presence.

Step 4: Choosing Presence

The Story

When Steve left Brandon's office, he couldn't shake the pastor's words. "Every evening you make choices... what you do with those hours is shaping the life you are building."

That night when he walked through the door, the recliner was waiting. The remote control was right where he had left it. His body almost moved on autopilot toward his old pattern. But something stopped him.

Instead of collapsing into the chair, he walked into the kitchen. Grace was at the counter chopping vegetables for dinner. For months, he had barely noticed the small things she did to keep their home running. But tonight, he stood beside her.

"Need a hand?" he asked, unsure if his voice sounded as nervous as he felt.

Grace looked up, surprised. Her eyes softened, and for the first time in weeks, she smiled at him. Not a forced smile, but something real.

Without another word, Steve grabbed a cutting board and joined her. He washed, chopped, stirred - whatever she was doing, he helped. They didn't have a deep conversation. They didn't unpack their marriage. But something shifted. Just being in the same space, side by side, felt different.

That evening, instead of eating in front of the TV, they sat at the table. The silence between them wasn't gone, but it was less heavy. For the first time in a long while, Steve felt present. He noticed the sound of her laughter at a small joke. He noticed the way her shoulders relaxed when he asked about her day. He noticed that connection, however fragile, was still possible.

The next night, he chose it again. And the night after that. One evening at a time, he resisted the pull of the recliner and leaned into presence. Slowly, warmth began returning to their home. Slowly, Grace began to open up too.

It wasn't a miracle fix. Their marriage still had wounds to heal. But Steve realized something profound. Healing wasn't only about avoiding the old patterns. It was about choosing new ones. It was about showing up. It was about presence.

The Pastor's Takeaway

We often underestimate the power of presence. We think change requires grand gestures, dramatic breakthroughs, or major decisions. But more often, healing begins in the ordinary moments when we choose to show up.

Presence is not about fixing everything. It is about being available, attentive, and engaged. It is about leaning into the people God has placed in your life instead of pulling away. For Steve, choosing presence meant standing next to Grace in the kitchen, eating at the table instead of in front of the TV, and asking questions that showed he cared.

Scripture reminds us, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Carrying burdens doesn’t always mean solving problems. Sometimes it simply means being there. Presence is ministry. Presence is love in action.

When we are present with others, we mirror the heart of God. Jesus did not remain distant from our struggles. He entered into them. He walked among us, ate meals with us, and carried the weight of our sin on His shoulders. Choosing presence is choosing to love like Jesus.

The truth is, absence breeds distance. Presence builds connection. Choosing presence day after day may not feel dramatic, but it creates the space where trust, intimacy, and healing can grow.

Discussion and Reflection

- Think about your own routines. Where are you tempted to “check out” instead of being present?
- How does distraction - whether TV, phones, or busyness - keep us from showing up for the people who matter most?
- Who in your life has shown you the gift of presence? What impact did it make on you?
- Galatians 6:2 calls us to carry one another's burdens. How might presence be the first step in doing that?
- What fears or excuses keep you from slowing down and being present with the people closest to you?

Practical Application

This week, set aside one evening to intentionally choose presence. Put away the TV, silence your phone, and focus on connecting with someone in your home or circle of relationships. If you are married, share a meal at the table and ask your spouse about their day. If you live alone, invite a friend over or call someone and give them your full attention. End the evening with a simple prayer of thanks. Presence is the soil where healing begins.

Step 5: Starting Right

The Story

Steve walked into Brandon's office with a lighter step than before. His conversations with Grace were improving. They were laughing more. They were beginning to rediscover the warmth they had lost. For the first time in years, he felt hopeful about his marriage.

"Pastor, things are better," Steve said as he sat down. "Grace and I are connecting again. We're talking more. Even our romantic side - it feels like we've found each other again."

Brandon smiled warmly. "That's wonderful, Steve. I'm glad to hear it."

But then Brandon's tone shifted, and his eyes grew serious. "I need to ask you something. Are you truly happy with yourself?"

Steve blinked, caught off guard. "Well... yeah, I guess. Things are definitely better. We're in a better place than before."

Brandon leaned forward. "I didn't ask about your marriage. I asked about you."

The smile faded from Steve's face. He exhaled slowly. "That's... a different story."

Brandon nodded gently. "I think it's time we take a look at your mornings."

"My mornings?" Steve raised an eyebrow. "I thought we were talking about evenings - about being present at home."

"Evenings matter," Brandon replied, "but mornings tell the deeper story. Evenings prepare you for rest. Mornings reveal what you are building your life on. The way you begin your day shapes your mindset, your focus, and your faith. If you wake up in a frenzy, the whole day feels rushed. If you start with discouragement, the day feels heavy. But if you start with God, you step into the day grounded and steady."

Steve leaned back, processing the words. He thought about his routine - hitting snooze, rushing through breakfast, grabbing his keys, and starting the day already on edge. Brandon was right. His mornings were unfiltered, and they revealed the clutter in his soul.

Brandon continued, "Here's my challenge for you: start your mornings with Scripture. Just five minutes. Open the Psalms. Let God set the tone for your day."

Steve remembered when Brandon had once told him to read a Psalm before bed. He hadn't followed through. He sighed, realizing how often

he had started his days without God, relying instead on his own strength.

Something stirred in him. If his evenings were shaping his marriage, maybe his mornings could shape his soul.

That night, he set his Bible on the nightstand. The next morning, before touching his phone, before turning on the news, he opened to Psalm 1.

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked... but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.”

The words pierced him. He wanted that blessing. He wanted that life. Not just for himself, but for Grace too.

It was a small step, but it was a step toward starting right.

The Pastor's Takeaway

How we begin our day matters. The first moments of the morning set the tone for everything that follows. Too often, we stumble into the day unprepared - checking emails, scrolling through headlines, rushing through routines - and then

wonder why we feel anxious, distracted, or spiritually dry.

Scripture shows us a different way. Psalm 5:3 says, “In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.” The psalmist didn’t see mornings as wasted time. He saw them as sacred space - an opportunity to set his heart on God before anything else claimed his attention.

Starting right is not about adding more to your to-do list. It is about beginning with the One who gives your life purpose. When you start with God, you remember who you are. You remember whose you are. You step into the day not in your own strength, but in His.

The truth is, habits will shape your life whether you choose them or not. The question is: will your habits form you into the likeness of Christ, or into the image of the world? Beginning each day with God—through prayer, Scripture, and gratitude - anchors your identity in Him.

The mornings you spend with God will not make every day easy, but they will make every day different. They shift your focus from yourself to the One who is faithful. They ground you in His love before the world tries to define your worth.

Starting right each morning is one of the most practical ways to live into the transformation God desires for you.

Discussion and Reflection

- What is your current morning routine? How does it set the tone for your day - for better or worse?
- Have you ever noticed how skipping time with God in the morning leaves you feeling rushed, distracted, or empty?
- Psalm 5:3 shows us the psalmist praying and waiting expectantly. How might beginning your day with expectation change your perspective?
- What keeps you from making God the first focus of your morning - time, distractions, or habits?
- If your mornings revealed the state of your heart, what would they say about where your trust is placed?

Practical Application

This week, commit to five minutes with God each morning before you check your phone, turn on the TV, or start your tasks. Open the Psalms, read a short passage, and pray a simple prayer: “God, guide my steps today.” Write down one word or verse that stands out to you, and carry it with you throughout the day. Begin your day with Him, and notice how it changes the way you live.

Step 6: Living the Daily Grind

The Story

The weeks that followed were not marked by fireworks or dramatic breakthroughs. Steve didn't wake up one morning suddenly transformed. Instead, change came quietly, almost imperceptibly, like spring slowly breaking through the grip of winter.

Each morning, he opened the Psalms before anything else. Some days the words felt alive, leaping off the page. Other days, they felt dry, like reading through fog. But he kept showing up. As he drove to work, he turned off the talk radio that once filled him with frustration and replaced it with worship music that lifted his spirit.

Little by little, Steve began noticing things he had overlooked before - the golden streaks of sunrise glinting across his windshield, the way Grace's laughter brightened their home, the small kindness of a neighbor waving as he pulled into the driveway.

At work, he carried a calmer spirit. The frustrations that once set him off didn't control him in the same way. At home, he found himself reaching for Grace's hand in the kitchen, not because he had to, but because he wanted to.

By the time his next meeting with Pastor Brandon came, Steve's face carried a lightness that hadn't been there in years.

"Things are better," he said. "Not perfect, but better. I'm enjoying life again. Grace and I are talking more, laughing more. I feel like I'm really seeing her - and myself - in a new way."

Brandon smiled. "That's wonderful, Steve. But now comes the hard part."

Steve tilted his head. "Wait, I thought this was the hard part."

Brandon leaned in. "You've been building new rhythms for several weeks. That's enough time for habits to take root. But here's the danger - you might start trusting the habits themselves instead of trusting God. You might think, 'If I just do this and this, I'll be fine.' But spiritual transformation isn't about checking boxes. It's about surrender. It's about relationship."

Steve nodded slowly. He realized he had been clinging to the comfort of the new routines. They

gave him a sense of control. But control was not the same as trust.

Brandon continued, “Here’s one way to stay grounded - gratitude. Pay attention to how often you say ‘thank you.’ Gratitude shifts your eyes off yourself and onto the Giver. It keeps your heart awake to God, so you don’t worship the habits but the One who is shaping you through them.”

That night, as Steve cleared the dinner table with Grace, he paused and said, “Thank you. For sticking with me. For loving me even when I wasn’t easy to love.” Her eyes softened, and her simple response - “I’m proud of you” - undid him.

It wasn’t perfection. But it was peace. For the first time in a long time, Steve felt like he was truly living.

The Pastor’s Takeaway

Real transformation is not measured by dramatic moments, but by daily faithfulness. The daily grind - those ordinary, repetitive choices - is where God does His deepest work.

The temptation in spiritual growth is to make it about control. We convince ourselves that if we pray enough, read enough, or try hard enough, we

can guarantee results. But transformation is not about our effort alone. It is about surrender. The habits are good, but they are not the source of life. God is.

This is why gratitude is so powerful. Gratitude re-centers us. It reminds us that everything we have is a gift. Paul writes in Philippians 4:6-7, “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, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Did you catch that? Peace comes through prayer - and thanksgiving. Gratitude shifts us from striving to surrender. It keeps us focused not on the routine itself, but on the God who meets us in it.

Transformation is sustained not by willpower but by worship. It is not about holding everything together - it is about letting God hold you.

Discussion and Reflection

- What daily habits or rhythms give you a sense of control? How do you know when you are trusting the routine instead of trusting God?

- How have you seen God use small, ordinary choices to bring about slow but steady change in your life?
- Philippians 4:6–7 ties peace to thanksgiving. Why do you think gratitude is so important in guarding our hearts and minds?
- What are some small things in your life right now that you could thank God for, even if everything isn't perfect?
- How does surrendering control feel different from simply working harder to fix yourself?

Practical Application

Each day this week, write down three things you are grateful for - big or small. End your prayer time by thanking God specifically for each one. Then, share one of those “thank yous” with someone else. Gratitude keeps your eyes open to God’s presence and helps you live with peace in the daily grind.

Step 7: Inviting Others to Begin Again

The Story

Steve was finishing lunch at a small diner downtown when a familiar figure shuffled past the window. His posture was slouched, his clothes wrinkled, his face hollow. Steve's heart sank. It was Bryan.

He dropped a few bills on the table and hurried outside. "Bryan?"

At first Bryan's expression was blank, but when he recognized Steve, the facade broke. Tears welled in his eyes, spilling before he could stop them. His shoulders shook as he choked out, "I can't do this anymore. I've ruined everything. My wife's gone. My life's a mess. I've tried to change, but nothing works."

Steve didn't rush to offer advice. He didn't preach a sermon. He just stood close, listening. For years, Bryan had been the strong one in Steve's eyes, the man who always seemed to have it together. Now he was broken, barely holding on.

After a long pause, Bryan looked at him, desperate. "I don't know what's different about

you, Steve, but you're not the same. You look free. What changed?"

Steve swallowed hard. This was the moment. He told Bryan the truth. He spoke of the nights he almost gave up, the counseling sessions that forced him to face himself, the conversations with Pastor Brandon that gave him perspective, and the small daily rhythms - Scripture, prayer, gratitude - that slowly brought him back to life. He told him how Grace had noticed the change, how their marriage was healing step by step. He didn't pretend it was easy. He didn't make himself the hero. He just pointed to the grace of God that had met him in his brokenness.

Bryan listened quietly, his tears slowing. His voice was fragile but sincere. "I think I need that too. Maybe a counselor. Maybe Brandon. I can't keep living like this."

Steve nodded. "I'll go with you if you want."

In that moment, Steve realized something important. Starting over was never just about him. It was about reaching back for the people still stuck in the storm, offering them the same hope he had found. His story wasn't just about recovery. It was about responsibility.

The Pastor's Takeaway

When God begins to transform us, it is never just for our own sake. Healing is always meant to ripple outward. The grace that restores us is the same grace that equips us to walk with others in their struggles.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17–18, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Did you catch that? The moment you become new in Christ, God hands you a ministry - the ministry of reconciliation. You are called not just to experience healing but to share it. Not just to start over, but to invite others to do the same.

This doesn't mean you need to have all the answers. You don't have to fix people's problems. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is simply show up, listen, and remind them they are not alone. That is what Steve did for Bryan. His presence and honesty opened a door for hope.

Your story might be the key that unlocks someone else's prison. The scars you carry might be the very evidence someone needs to believe that healing is possible. When you share what God has

done in your life, you become a living testimony of His grace.

Inviting others to begin again is not about perfection. It is about pointing people to the God who never gives up, the God who offers second chances, and the God who can make all things new.

Discussion and Reflection

- Who in your life reminds you of Bryan: someone who is carrying more than they can bear?
- What holds you back from sharing your story with others? Is it fear of being judged, fear of rejection, or fear of not having the right words?
- 2 Corinthians 5:17–18 says God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. What does that mean for your daily life?
- Think of a time when someone else's testimony gave you hope. How could your testimony do the same for someone else?

- How might God be calling you to walk alongside someone right now—not to fix them, but to be present with them?

Practical Application

This week, ask God to show you one person who may be carrying a hidden burden. Reach out to them with a simple question: “How are you really doing?” Be ready to listen without judgment. If the opportunity arises, share one piece of your own story of God’s grace. Then commit to praying for them daily. Sometimes the most powerful ministry you can offer is your presence, your prayers, and your honesty.

A Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and Loving God,

We give You thanks for the gift of starting over. You are the God who meets us at the edge, who hears our cries in the silence, and who draws near when our hearts are heavy. Thank You for never turning away from our brokenness, but instead calling us to honesty, healing, and new life in Christ.

Lord, we confess that we cannot walk this road alone. Too often, we hide behind masks of strength while shame and fear weigh us down. Yet in Your mercy, You invite us into community, into vulnerability, and into the freedom that comes when we bring our struggles into the light.

We thank You for the small, daily choices that form us. Teach us to unwind the old patterns that keep us distant and to choose presence with You and with those we love. May our mornings begin with Your Word, our days be filled with gratitude, and our lives be shaped by surrender to Your Spirit.

And now, God, as You continue to transform us, remind us that this journey is not just for ourselves. You have entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. Open our eyes to those around

us who are weary, broken, or searching for hope. Give us courage to share our stories honestly, to offer presence instead of quick fixes, and to walk with others as they begin again.

May our lives bear witness to Your grace. May our words and actions point people to the God who makes all things new. And may we never forget that no matter how many times we stumble, in Christ there is always an invitation to start over.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

Amen.

Appendix: How to Use This Book

This book was written to help you start over with God's grace, not just in theory, but in practice. There are two primary ways you can use it: as an individual journey of reflection or as a shared experience in a small group.

1. Using This Book as an Individual Reflection and Journey

If you are walking through this book on your own, here's how to get the most out of it:

- Take your time. Do not rush through the steps. Each chapter ends with reflection questions and a practical application. Pause there. Journal your thoughts. Pray honestly. The goal is not to finish quickly but to go deeply.
- Use a journal. Write down what stands out to you, what stirs your heart, and where you feel resistance. Capture both your struggles

and your prayers. Looking back later will remind you how far God has brought you.

- Set a rhythm. Consider reading one step per week. Spend the rest of the week practicing the application and returning to the questions. Let the truth sink in and shape you before moving on.
- Pray through it. At the end of each step, pray. The pastoral prayer at the close of Step 7 can serve as a model for how to lift your own journey to God.
- Invite accountability. Even if you read alone, find a trusted friend or mentor to check in with. Share what you are learning and how you are growing.

2. Using This Book as a Small Group

This book can also serve as a guide for small groups of men, women, or mixed circles who are seeking transformation together. Here's how to structure it:

- Plan the journey. Commit to at least seven weeks - one session per step. Groups that want to go deeper may extend to 10-12

weeks, allowing more time for discussion and prayer.

- Read before you meet. Encourage participants to read the step in advance. Ask them to highlight moments in the story or takeaway that resonated with them.
- Use the questions. Each step already includes discussion and reflection questions. Begin with those, but allow the Spirit to lead into honest conversation. The goal is not to “get through” every question but to invite openness and vulnerability.
- Practice together. Each step ends with a practical application. Challenge group members to try it during the week. Begin the next meeting by sharing how it went. Celebrate progress and encourage perseverance.
- Model vulnerability. If you are leading, go first. Share honestly about your own struggles. Your openness will give others permission to take off their masks.
- Pray every time. End each session with prayer. Use the suggested prayer prompts, or invite group members to pray for one another. Make it safe, simple, and Spirit-led.

- Continue the journey. After the seven steps are complete, consider meeting monthly to check in. Transformation is a lifelong process, and community helps us stay the course.

Whether you are walking this road alone with God or alongside a group of fellow travelers, remember: starting over is always possible. Take one step at a time. Trust the process. And never forget that God is already walking with you.

Appendix: Sample 7-Week Group Outline

This outline is designed to help group leaders walk through Starting Over step by step. Each session is structured for about 60–75 minutes. Adjust as needed for your group's size and rhythm.

Week 1 – Facing the Edge

Theme: Honesty is the first step toward healing.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Prayer (5 min) – Open with a short prayer for honesty and courage.
2. Story Recap (10 min) – Summarize Steve's moment at the bar, naming his brokenness.
3. Discussion (30 min) – Use the provided questions. Emphasize how shame keeps people silent and how God meets us at the edge.
4. Application (10 min) – Encourage journaling this week about hidden struggles.

5. Closing Prayer (5 min) – Invite each person to silently name one area of brokenness before God.

Week 2 – Taking the First Step

Theme: Vulnerability opens the door to healing.

Scripture: James 5:16

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Check-In (5 min) – Ask, “What was it like to write or reflect on your struggles this week?”
2. Story Recap (10 min) – Steve and Bryan admit their struggles.
3. Discussion (30 min) – Explore the power of confession and why vulnerability feels risky.
4. Application (10 min) – Challenge each participant to share one struggle with a trusted person this week.
5. Closing Prayer (5 min) – Pray for courage to be honest.

Week 3 – Unwinding the Old Patterns

Theme: Healing requires intentional change in daily habits.

Scripture: Romans 12:2

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Check-In (5 min) – “What did it feel like to open up to someone this week?”
2. Story Recap (10 min) – Steve meets with Brandon and realizes his evenings shape his marriage.
3. Discussion (30 min) – Talk about daily patterns that create distance from God or others.
4. Application (10 min) – Choose one evening this week to try something different (family meal, meaningful conversation, prayer).
5. Closing Prayer (5 min) – Ask God to give strength to resist old patterns.

Week 4 – Choosing Presence

Theme: Small choices to show up build connection and healing.

Scripture: Galatians 6:2

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Check-In (5 min) – Share how evening changes went.
2. Story Recap (10 min) – Steve helps Grace in the kitchen instead of zoning out.
3. Discussion (30 min) – What does real presence look like in your relationships?
4. Application (10 min) – Commit to one specific act of presence this week (listen, serve, pray with someone).
5. Closing Prayer (5 min) – Pray for God to deepen connections in the group's homes and friendships.

Week 5 – Starting Right

Theme: Mornings set the tone for the day.

Scripture: Psalm 5:3

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Check-In (5 min) – “How did choosing presence affect your week?”
2. Story Recap (10 min) – Steve learns to begin his mornings with Scripture and prayer.
3. Discussion (30 min) – What morning habits set or derail your day?
4. Application (10 min) – Begin each morning with 5 minutes in the Psalms and prayer.
5. Closing Prayer (5 min) – Dedicate mornings to God together.

Week 6 – Living the Daily Grind

Theme: Transformation is sustained through gratitude and surrender.

Scripture: Philippians 4:6–7

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Check-In (5 min) – Share morning experiences with God.

2. Story Recap (10 min) – Steve learns not to cling to habits but to the God who sustains him.
3. Discussion (30 min) – Why is gratitude central to spiritual growth?
4. Application (10 min) – Write down 3 things each day to thank God for, and share one with another person.
5. Closing Prayer (5 min) – Thank God aloud for blessings in the group.

Week 7 – Inviting Others to Begin Again

Theme: Our healing becomes a testimony for others.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17–18

Session Flow:

1. Welcome & Check-In (5 min) – Reflect on gratitude practices.
2. Story Recap (10 min) – Steve sees Bryan again and shares his story of transformation.

3. Discussion (30 min) – How can our stories bring hope to others? Who might God be calling us to walk with?
4. Application (10 min) – Identify one person you can reach out to with honesty, encouragement, or prayer.
5. Closing Prayer (10 min) – End with commissioning: ask God to send each participant into their relationships with courage to share His grace.

Leader's Note: End the journey by celebrating progress. Remind the group that starting over is not a one-time event but a lifelong invitation. Encourage continued accountability and connection beyond the 7 weeks.

Appendix:

Recommended Reading Guide

These resources align naturally with the journey of starting over. Use them as companions to the steps in this book.

Marriage and Relationships

- Love and Respect – Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

Explores the deep needs of men and women in marriage—love for her and respect for him—and offers practical tools to strengthen communication and intimacy.

Pairs with Step 4: Choosing Presence – because being present and attentive in marriage requires understanding and honoring one another’s deepest needs.

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

- Practicing the Way – John Mark Comer

Guides readers in shaping their lives around the practices of Jesus—prayer, community, Sabbath, simplicity—so that spiritual formation becomes a daily reality.

Pairs with Step 5: Starting Right – since forming new rhythms each morning and throughout the day helps establish a life centered on Christ.

- The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry – John Mark Comer

A timely call to slow down in a culture of distraction and busyness, reclaiming the unhurried lifestyle of Jesus.

Pairs with Step 3: Unwinding the Old Patterns – because slowing down and resisting distraction is key to breaking destructive habits and creating healthier rhythms.

- The Awe of God – John Bevere

A reminder of the transforming nature of holy reverence for God. Shows how awe deepens worship, fuels obedience, and reorients life around God's greatness.

Pairs with Step 6: Living the Daily Grind – because gratitude and reverence keep us

focused on God instead of simply on our routines.

Healing and Inner Freedom

- Let Jesus Heal Your Hidden Wounds – Brad Long

Helps readers bring hidden hurts, past trauma, and emotional wounds into the light of Christ for deep healing and freedom.

Pairs with Step 1: Facing the Edge – when honesty and brokenness first come to the surface, this resource shows how Jesus meets us in hidden pain.

- Shadow Boxing – Henry Malone

A resource on spiritual warfare and inner healing. Teaches how to identify and confront lies, wounds, and destructive patterns that keep people stuck.

Pairs with Step 2: Taking the First Step – because confessing struggles and addressing hidden battles requires naming the lies and replacing them with truth.

- The Bait of Satan – John Beveré

Confronts the destructive cycle of offense and unforgiveness. Offers practical steps to walk free from bitterness, division, and relational traps that the enemy uses.

Pairs with Step 7: Inviting Others to Begin Again – since forgiveness and reconciliation are essential if we are to walk with others and help them start over.

Leadership and Influence

- The Emotionally Healthy Leader – Peter Scazzero

Written for pastors, ministry leaders, and influencers, this book highlights the importance of emotional health in leadership. Shows how spiritual depth and inner wholeness can flow into every area of work and ministry.

Pairs with Step 6: Living the Daily Grind – because sustainable transformation requires emotional and spiritual health, especially for those leading others.

How to Use These Pairings:

- As you complete each step, choose the recommended book for that stage of the journey.
- Read slowly, letting the wisdom connect with what God is already teaching you.
- Share what you learn with your group or a trusted friend.

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 (www.revryanstratton.com), you can find him serving in the community, participating in local outreach, or simply enjoying time with his family.