

HIT THE RESTART BUTTON

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Maybe you've heard—our Creator is sometimes called the God of the second-chance, that He supports necessary restarts, do-overs, and new beginnings.

Jonah, who is probably best known for his short stay in the Bottom of the Sea Motel, had been given an unpleasant assignment by God. He thought he could run away from his charge. But where do you hide from the God who is everywhere and sees everything?

When Jonah finally relented and confessed his foolishness, the Bible says, "*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time*" (Jonah 3:1). God was not finished with him, even though Jonah resisted and ran away.

After a selfish act, a bad decision, a job loss, a divorce, a major accident, a dreaded disease, or the loss of a loved one, a new beginning becomes necessary. Strange as it seems, shame and grief grow heavier and threaten to smother if we merely sit with them. Lest we are crushed by their weight, difficult though it is, we must move on. And it is God who will be your biggest supporter in such moves. (Consider, if you know it, the Bible story of Job.)

Hit the restart button.

Even churches (and other organizations) must go through such cycles of life. Fifteen years ago, we first attempted a remodel project, on a scale beyond our financial capacity. We endeavored to raise funds for the work by subdividing our property and building high-end homes. What we couldn't foresee was the epic decline of the housing market in 2007, which capsized our strategy, leaving us with \$500,000 to accomplish a \$5 million project.

I call it our Titanic season. In a month's time, 40% of our congregation was swept away by the grief and confusion and frustration. The rest of us clung to the wreckage of our dream and put our hope in God and in each other.

Whatever your highest goal in life, it will require a corresponding level of effort and stamina to reach your goal. Be prepared to work hard!

If you reach your goal, you will face a decision: break your own record, rest on your laurels, rest on your laurels and write a book about it, or (a most popular decision these days) rest on your laurels and write a book about it AND coach others to do the same.

But if you fall short of your goal, you face a more difficult decision: try again, move the goal post, or give up your dream.

Hit the restart button.

Life is so full of problems! Relational problems, financial problems, scheduling problems, material problems, timing problems, emotional problems, health problems.

(I'm so aware of the power of words when I speak to you! A single word can elicit feelings that defeat or feelings that encourage. If you're a mathematician, "problem" may be a stimulating word. But for most people, "problem" is a deflating word—they seem to never go away, they are seldom adequately resolved, they cost money we didn't want to spend, and so on.

On the other hand, when I say "challenge," it generates an inner sense of possibility, of hope—it may cost something, but at least there's the hint of resolution, or repair, or conquest.

So, let me say that again: Life is so full of challenges! Relational challenges, financial challenges, scheduling challenges, material challenges, timing challenges, emotional challenges, and health challenges, just to name a few.

God is *not* a genie-in-a-book, which, if you store it in a conspicuous place in your home (though you never read it), will grant your every wish for a better and easier life.

But, if you put your trust (however wavering) in God, He will guide your ship to a safe haven, even if the vessel itself is broken up in the landing.

"Though You have made me see troubles, many and bitter, You will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up" (Psalm 71:20; NIV). Redemption is God's specialty.

The family of God-followers is, above all, a lineage of redemption. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, David, Peter, and literally millions of others... all started over. Failure, even repeated failure, didn't disqualify them from God's best. In fact, our Redeemer used failure to prepare and to qualify them for greater service.

He still does. *Hit the restart button.*

Jesus' well-known disciple, Peter, may be the epitome of second chances.

He walked on the water with Jesus. Yet, moments later, he sank like a stone.

When Peter grasped the revelation of Jesus' deity, Jesus commended him in front of others. However, in the very same chapter (Matthew 16), Jesus rebuked Peter with this epithet: "Get behind me, Satan!"

Naturally, it was Peter who failed Jesus completely and publicly on the night Jesus was taken into Roman custody. In a matter of moments, he was exposed as a cussing fisherman and a fearful, disloyal man. Everyone could see he wasn't good enough or strong enough to follow Jesus.

Peter's heart was crushed, his future gone. Jesus died and so did Peter's dream of a revived kingdom. There was nothing left for him to do but go fishing; get lost in that ancient fusion of salty air, screeching seagulls, and the groans of wooden hulls against the water.

And it was right there, in Peter's nautical hideaway, that the resurrected Jesus found him and called him into greater service than he'd ever imagined. Peter became one of the true load-bearing pillars of the early Christian church. Peter's apparent fall from grace was, in fact, a fall *into grace*.

Our dramatic loss of people and income in 2008, qualified us for help from our denomination that would otherwise have been unavailable to us! These volunteer builders came to our aid, along with local professionals, and created this which you now see and enjoy! By a conservative estimate, the volunteers have already contributed \$536,300 in man-hours of labor!

Hit the restart button.

What does this all mean for Trinity Community Church? A fresh start. A new beginning.

To some degree, it feels like a reinvention of ourselves. In actuality, it's a rediscovery of who we were meant to become from the beginning.

In 1931, Sister Edith Erickson, a graduate of Glad Tidings Bible Institute in San Francisco, followed the Holy Spirit to San Rafael, where she rented an apartment on the east side of town and began inviting people to her home to study the Bible.

Six years later, a Pentecostal church was established, moving from her apartment to a storefront on the west side of town. They affiliated with the Assemblies of God in 1942 and became known as San Rafael Assembly of God. Ten years after that they purchased their own building at 517 D Street where they camped for the next 20 years.

The vision kept growing, its definition becoming clearer. Under the leadership of Pastor Reuben Sequeira, the church bought half a block of property on Grand Avenue in 1970, and invested the next two years of Saturdays, remodeling it for church use. Now

we have sold half of our property, in order to fit our facility for the next half century of ministry.

In remodeling this room, we estimate that we reduced the overall weight of the ceiling by seven tons. When we stripped the walls, we discovered that the windows were installed 45 years ago with inadequate headers, which caused the walls to sag and bow outward several inches. Dennis led the effort to install proper headers and king studs and pull the walls back to plumb, strengthening the entire frame of the building.

The room is insulated all around and above, the windows are double-paned, and it is lit entirely by LED lights, creating an energy-efficient space. Sound and lighting are digital state-of-the-art. The room itself is versatile, with flexible seating, and protected by fire sprinklers and alarm systems.

Accessibility is required in commercial construction today, but it is also a high value for our church. In addition to the physical accessibility of the rooms and the restrooms, and the larger, brighter visual screens, the Church Board has elected to add simultaneous language translation and hearing assistance equipment in the next month.

Our dream is to see God grow a church of many nations (at one time we counted 40% of our congregants as first-generation immigrants from 14 non-English language groups). A church that worships and serves the Marin community together, as a witness of Jesus Christ's vision to make many into "one people," where God's love irons out the wrinkles and overshadows the differences among us.

Jesus said, *"I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples"* (John 13:34-35).

We are hitting the restart button.

In our world today, there's a lot of talk about love. It's always been a popular topic and pursuit, and still an elusive target.

Love is a feeling, really a host of feelings (desire, connection, possession, protection, fulfillment). Herein lies the difficulty, for feelings are fleeting and feelings rise and fall, and feelings are inherently self-centered. And that kind of love is sketchy, at best.

There is a love that is so much more than that. It is the love that endures the ups and downs and ins and outs of life, the love that overcomes lack of positive feelings or the overwhelm of negative feelings, the love that sees and reaches for a much bigger picture than mere self-satisfaction. Instead of the love that takes, it is the love that gives (and gives and gives). It is the love that aims for another person's fulfillment. It is the love that never gives up.

Where do you think that love comes from? It comes from our Maker. It's part of His design for us. It's the way He loves us. And it's the way He made us to love others.

Listen to these familiar words, from the plume of the Apostle Paul, usually only heard at weddings, and only half-heard then:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Who would mind being loved like that?

Paul said this kind of love is better than supernatural gifts and abilities, and any other kind of sacrificial service. He said, *"If I didn't love others, I would be nothing... I would have gained nothing"* (1 Corinthians 13:2-3).

Now, who is willing to learn to love like that?

Well, you can't learn it from a book or a YouTube video. And you can't get it by just changing your words or your actions. It comes from outside of us. We each need to receive it.

The Bible says, *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). And, *"the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us"* (Romans 5:5).

Without God's gift of supernatural love, we're just naturally too broken and too mean to change more than superficially. But a deeper change is possible. That is what the church is supposed to be about—helping each other make that journey to wholeness. That's what this church intends to be and to do.

We're hitting the restart button.

Please continue to help us with your prayers and support.