

Topic - A Fresh Start With God

Date/s - 6 January 2019

Scripture - Isaiah 43:18-19

Speaker/s - Pastor Ben KC Lee

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like “This Is Amazing Grace”, “What A Beautiful Name” or “Build My Life”.

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Rely on God’s promise for a new way in Christ and
2. Commit to putting Christ first in 2019!

Word [45 min]

In this inaugural message for 2019, Pastor Ben encouraged the church with the same directive the prophet Isaiah gave to Israel in Babylon. “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:18-19) The context of this Scripture begins with Isaiah 43:14-17 where Isaiah was writing to God’s people in captivity in Babylon. The book of Isaiah also includes several prophecies about the coming Messiah – their (and our) ultimate Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

In view of the economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions around us, we are tempted to “play God” and depend on ourselves. Like Israel under captivity, we are prone to either fight our own battles or resign to our own fate. But God tells us otherwise. He is a God of new things. He wants to make all things new – for us! He wants to realign our hearts with His. God is calling us, through this Scripture, to look to Him, not at our circumstances, and to focus on our freedom in Christ, not on our perceived “slavery” to world events. God wants us to:

1. Stop Looking Behind (v.18)

- a) Don’t expect past victories to sustain you (v.18a)
- b) Don’t allow past failures to paralyse you (v.18b)

Pastor Ben challenged us not to look at our rear-view mirror. Although there is a time and place to recollect past events to glean its wisdom, we don’t stay there. Don’t expect past victories to sustain us. (See Judges 6:13). The past is a great place to learn from but it’s a terrible place to live in. Some of us hang on to our baggage (unresolved issues, failures and negativity) for too long. Learn from them and let them go! (See Psalm 32:5) If we live in the past, we will never embrace the future God has in store for us.

The question we must ask ourselves then is, “**What is God saying to us today?**” In 2 Corinthians 5:17, He gives us the answer, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the

new has come.” This is the heart of the Gospel! Our past failures, brokenness and pain no longer define us, condemn us or rule over us. We are a completely new creation and we have a new Spirit living in us!

2. Start Looking Ahead (v.19)

- a) See God bring newness (v.19a)
- b) Anticipate God do something great (v.19b)

While we look forward to the new things of God, Pastor Ben cautioned us not to make an idol out of the “new”. (See Acts 17:21) Be vigilant that our ears do not itch for new fads or experiences that count for nothing. We must be careful when God brings newness that we don’t err and work against it by giving glory to the “new thing” and not to God. (See Hebrews 12:2) God is saying to us, “I’m doing something new in your life now. Can you see it or discern it? If you don’t, how will you remain in step with the Holy Spirit in 2019?”

What is that new thing in your life? It is like God saying, “I led you out of slavery and sin. I saved you from certain death. But being delivered from slavery and death is not the destination. I have something better and different for you but it’s going to require you to keep moving forward even through a dangerous, hostile and inhospitable wilderness. I am making a path in the wilderness and am refreshing you with streams of living water in the desert that as you walk in obedience to Me, you are constantly walking away from what was and walking towards what will be. This path is not for one person but a people. You are invited to a family road trip. You are a family on mission together.”

Pastor Ben highlighted some “new things” happening this year in RiverLife:

1. **Equipping.** 2019 will be a season of equipping, of building us up to reach our full potential for what God is calling us to do.
2. **Pulpit.** We will embark on the study of two books in the Bible: Haggai and 1 Corinthians.
3. **Services.** There will be a focus on improvements to service punctuality, weekly bulletin and seating arrangement for a more united congregational worship and prayer. More details will be shared over the next few weeks.

Our Response

God has a fresh start for us in 2019. Let’s anticipate Him doing something great. When we do, He promises to remove all obstacles of coming to Him. (See Romans 8:31-39, a counterpart of Isaiah 43:18-19) Whatever may be holding us back – wrong thinking, past mistakes, failed relationships – Jesus Christ has already died for them. We are no longer under their control. Jesus is our way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. He will transform our desert into fields of blessings and our wasteland into gardens of abundance!

Let us therefore join God’s great and new things in 2019 while we put Christ first in our *time*, our *finances*, and our *relationships*. Our primary resolution this year is to **believe God for something new!**

Discussion Questions

1. **Read Isaiah 43:18-19 aloud. How does Isaiah 43:18-19 speak to your heart as you read it today at the beginning of the new year?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: A recap question to share how this Scripture speaks to each member's life in light of the new year. A new year is a time to pause and reflect on the turning of the calendar. Moses asked of the Lord, "Teach us to number our days, so we may get a heart of wisdom" (Ps 90:12). Time – seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years – is a gift to us from a good God. To wisely follow him, then, is to redeem our time (Eph 5:16). A new year also reminds us of the new birth. In a sense, each day with Jesus is a chance to turn the page on an old way of life and embrace a new one. We are, after all, new creation people, and we serve a King who renews us daily by the Holy Spirit.

See <https://goo.gl/6bsuHo> for Four Ways to Approach the New Year with Jesus. (thegospelcoalition.org)

2. **How can I look at things differently to see or perceive the newness God wants to bring?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: A deeper question for members to articulate what "newness" or "a new thing" look like to each person. Is it something God does? Or something we commit to do on our own? Or is it a combination of both? Can it be a renewing of old commitments – like marriage, family, and church? Before we begin new plans to eat healthier, get more exercise or save more money – good goals – let's begin by renewing the core commitments we already have.

Perhaps before we renew our commitments, let God renew us. Let God do a new thing in our hearts. Just as David prayed after he fell into sin: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:10). Wanting a new thing from God without a renewal in our hearts is of no use and will have no eternal value. The heart provides needed "blood flow" to the rest of our spiritual being. God wants to renew our hearts.

See <https://goo.gl/6bKgzg> for Three Ways God Makes All Things New. (unlockingthebible.org)

3. **What truth (or Scripture) can I declare today to help my heart trust God for something new?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: A reflect question to help members draw from their faith journey or the Bible a promise to call their own. It may be the best-loved promise of Jeremiah 29:11 – "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Or the confessional Ephesians 4:22 – "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Whatever truths we declare, let's offer them to the Lord. Ultimately He is the One with the power and grace to help us trust Him, remembering that, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

See <https://goo.gl/eMw5Ck> for more promises in the Bible for the new year. (biblestudytools.com)

4. What new thing is God wanting to do in our cell group this year? [10 min]

Leader's Notes: *A response question for members to discuss the possibilities of joining God in a new thing He is calling the cell to do. Maybe the cell enjoyed the time spent together on a mission trip or at an outreach event. We can take intentional steps to organise more of the same but in new and more creative ways. Or perhaps some of us remember how good it felt when we served people less fortunate than ourselves? It just may be what we need to do more of in the new year.*

See <https://goo.gl/hy9QXc> for inspirational ideas to serve Christ in the city. (ministrymagazine.org)

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will leave old baggage behind and pray for a new God-thing.

Announcement**1. Water Baptism Class**

Sat, 26 Jan | 9am-3pm | Faith Chapel

Register for this class at the Information Counter by Sun, 20 Jan. For enquiries, please contact Clara Tan at 6511 4160 or email her at claratan@riverlife.org.sg. Our next baptism service will be on Sun, 10 Mar.

Church Vision Statement:

"A vibrant family where sons and daughters mature and reveal the Father's glory from generation to generation."