

How Do We Build New Beginnings When We're Broken Builders?

Genesis 9:1-22

How many of you have ever said this: "This time will be different"?

New Year's resolution. New job. New relationship. "This time will be different."

And you meant it. You weren't lying. But then three months in—you looked around and realized: I'm doing the same things I swore I'd never do again. And that voice started whispering: "What's wrong with me?"

Here's what I've learned: Fresh starts don't fail because you're weak. They fail because you're building them on the wrong foundation.

We treat new beginnings like clean slates. Like if we just work hard enough, we can finally build the life we've been chasing. But you can't restart yourself. Only God can do that.

That's what Genesis 9 shows us. It shows us how we build new beginnings when we're broken builders.

There are four movements in this passage. Here's the first one.

God Anchors Our New Beginnings in Worship

Noah steps into a new world. Genesis 9:20 tells us, "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings on the altar."

The first thing he does is build an altar. Not a house for shelter. Not a garden for food. An altar. Worship was the first thing on his mind.

And God responds: "I will never again curse the ground because of human beings, even though the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward."

Catch that. Worship comes before the promise. The altar comes before the rainbow.

Noah doesn't worship because everything is figured out. He worships because God brought him through the flood and he's still alive. Some of us think worship comes after our life stabilizes. Noah shows us a different way. He worships before there's visible stability.

Because worship isn't the reward for stability. Worship is the foundation.

That altar is Noah saying, "Lord, before I build anything in this new world, I want to acknowledge that you're the reason I'm standing here." And that's what worship does. It reorients your trust.

When you step into a new season, your instinct is to secure outcomes. But the altar forces you to say, "God, I can't control what comes next. You hold my future."

The world says, "Secure yourself first, then you can afford to be spiritual." God says, "Build the altar first."

Not because God needs your worship. Because you need worship to remember who's holding your life together. Your hands can build. Only God can bless.

When you step into a new season, the first thing you do reveals who you're really trusting. So ask yourself: Have I built the altar yet?

This week, before you make the next move—stop. Give God an offering of worship. Prayer. Open the Word before you open your calendar. Gather with the church when you'd rather stay home. Put the altar first.

Noah built an altar. Before he secured his future, he worshiped the God who had already secured him.

God Restarts What Sin Ruins, But He Rebuilds It With Grace and Guardrails

Noah and his family are standing in a brand-new world. The judgment has passed. The old world is gone. Day one of Earth 2.0.

And God blesses him.

Genesis 9:1: "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'"

That word "blessed" matters. God is conferring favor. Power. Fruitfulness. Divine approval. He's saying, "My favor is still on you. My purpose is still for you."

Noah didn't create this new beginning. Noah didn't earn it. God initiated it.

And if the new beginning starts with God's blessing, then Noah's future isn't built on Noah's perfection. It's built on God's grace.

God is reaffirming what He said back in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." The flood didn't cancel the mandate. Sin brought judgment. Humanity had to start over. But God's purpose still stands.

But this time, something's different. God gives the same mandate, but He builds in new guardrails.

Before the flood, mankind ate plants. Now God allows meat. The animals will fear man. And in verses 5–6, God establishes accountability for murder. Why? Because human life is still sacred.

Even after the fall. Even after the flood. Even after God already said the human heart is evil from youth. Human life is still sacred because human beings still bear the image of God.

God is relaunching humanity with His eyes wide open. He knows Noah will fail again. He knows sin isn't gone. And yet, He blesses them anyway. And He puts structure around the blessing. Not to limit humanity. To protect what's sacred.

God's guardrails aren't evidence He's against us. They're evidence He knows what sin does when it goes unchecked.

Consider this from your own new beginning. Every fresh start comes with this tension: God's blessing meets your brokenness. And that collision—between what God offers and what you know about yourself—makes some of you wonder: "Can God really restart me? Can He actually make me prosper?"

But there's something else underneath that question. Some of you don't just struggle with your own inadequacy. You struggle because somebody who said they were here to help you actually took advantage of you. They dressed up exploitation as opportunity. They said, "This will be different." And it wasn't.

And now when you hear "new beginning," you tighten up because you've been burned before by people who said they had your best interest at heart. But they didn't.

To those of you who wrestle with feeling inadequate or lack trust to begin again, here's what makes Genesis 9 different. God doesn't ask Noah to step into a new world with blind trust. God is straight up with him.

He says, "The human heart is still broken. Violence is still a threat. Life is still sacred. And I'm putting guardrails around this new beginning so that despite your brokenness you can be fruitful and multiply over the earth."

Which is good news for anybody standing in the rubble wondering, "Can God use me again?"

Yes. Not because you're flawless. But because God restarts what sin ruins, and He rebuilds it with grace and guardrails.

So here's what God is offering you today.

If you're not yet following Jesus, God is offering you what you can't give yourself: a new heart. You can change your zip code, but you can't change your heart. That's what Jesus came to do. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, the new has come."

Not a better version of you. A new you. That's the fresh start you've been looking for. And it begins not with you trying harder, but with you trusting God.

If you're a Christian, God is offering you freedom from performance. Look at Genesis 9:1. God blesses Noah knowing what Noah will do in a few verses. He knows Noah will fail. And still, God blesses him.

God's new beginnings aren't grounded in your performance. They're grounded in His grace.

So you don't have to wait until you're perfect to obey. You can obey the next thing God has already told you, starting today. Because God didn't wait for Noah to become flawless before He called him to fruitfulness. He blessed him, commissioned him, and launched him forward knowing full well Noah was still broken.

And the same is true for you and me. He's not waiting for you to be ready. He's blessing you and saying, "Step forward. Trust me through this new season. Trust me through all your seasons."

So this week, take the next step. Obey with the grace you have. Because the God who restarted humanity through a broken man can restart you and make your way prosperous for His Glory.

God Promises What We Cannot Secure

Now the Lord God establishes a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature. The promise is clear: "Never again will every creature be wiped out by floodwaters; there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."

And what makes this covenant important is that God is the one making it. God is binding Himself to it. God is guaranteeing it.

Noah isn't negotiating. Noah isn't bringing terms to the table. God commits Himself. He says, "No matter what you do, Noah, no matter what happens with the rest of humanity, I will never destroy the earth by flood again."

That's covenant.

This is the first time the word covenant officially appears in Scripture, and it sets a pattern. God initiates. God obligates Himself. God keeps His word.

Noah can't preserve the earth. But God can. And God does.

The covenant isn't, "I'll protect you if you're righteous enough." The covenant is, "I will preserve both human and animal life." God already told us in Genesis 8:21 that the "inclination of the human heart is evil from youth." And yet, knowing that, He still makes the covenant.

That's the grace of covenant. God binds Himself to His word, not because man is reliable, but because He is.

Noah's hope isn't in Noah's ability to hold the future together. Noah's hope is in the God who made the declaration.

And that's where this comes home for us.

Like with Noah, God has made a covenant with you. He has bound Himself to His word. And that covenant doesn't depend on your performance. Noah can't preserve the earth. You can't preserve your future. But God can. And God does.

So here's the freedom that gives you: You don't have to carry what only He can keep. You don't have to guarantee outcomes He never asked you to secure. You can trust Him today because He has already promised to hold tomorrow.

This week, when you wake up and that voice says, "What if I can't hold this together?"—remember Genesis 9. God said, "I will never destroy the earth by flood again." You can trust Him today because He has already promised to hold tomorrow.

But how do you trust a declaration you can't see? How do you stake your life on words spoken 4,000 years ago?

That's why God doesn't just make a declaration—He gives a sign.

God Signs What He Swears

God does more than make a promise. He gives a sign: the rainbow.

Genesis 9:13: "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature for all future generations: I have placed my bow in the clouds."

God says when the bow appears in the clouds, He will see it and remember His covenant. When the Bible says God remembers, it means God acts in faithfulness to what He has sworn. The rainbow is a visible sign that God remains committed to His covenant.

And the instrument God uses matters. He says, "I have placed my bow in the clouds." Why?

In the ancient world, a bow was a weapon of war. But in Genesis 9, God takes the bow and hangs it in the sky. The weapon is no longer aimed at the earth. It's set in the clouds as a sign of peace.

It's as if God is saying, "Before I destroy the earth by flood again, judgment would have to fall on Me first."

And that's exactly what happened at Calvary.

The judgment we deserved fell on Jesus. Isaiah 53:5: "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities."

The bow was set in the clouds in Genesis 9. But the judgment of God fell at Golgotha. Jesus stood in the place of sinners. And because He absorbed the judgment we deserved, we get to live free in God.

So every rainbow you see is God's signature in the sky. A reminder that He keeps His word. A sign that the judgment you deserved fell on Jesus. A declaration that you are free from condemnation.

But in our culture, the rainbow has been given another meaning.

There's a question that often comes up in divorce recovery groups: What do I do with the wedding ring? Some people keep it. Some sell it. Others melt it down. Why? Because the ring was supposed to be a sign of covenant love. But when the covenant breaks, the ring becomes a symbol of pain.

The same thing has happened with the rainbow. God gave it as a covenant sign between us and Himself. But our culture has recoded it. For some, it now represents LGBTQ+ pride—identity and inclusion. For others, it's become so politicized they won't touch it with a 10-foot pole.

But the rainbow was never ours to redefine.

Genesis 9:13 says, "I have placed my bow in the clouds." God assigned its meaning. It's His covenant sign.

And here's what matters: Many people in the LGBTQ+ community have heard what God is against, but not what God has done. They've heard Scripture used as a weapon, but not the gospel offered as an invitation to repent, believe, and live free.

Genesis 9 gives us a better way.

Who does the covenant include? It includes all flesh. That doesn't mean God endorses every lifestyle. But it does mean God is preserving life and extending mercy to a world full of sinners.

The same God who set the bow in the clouds also sent His Son to die for sinners of every kind. Sexual sin isn't outside the reach of the gospel. It's not outside the call to repentance. The gospel doesn't sidestep certain sins. It forgives all sin and gives sinners a new identity in Christ.

So we don't surrender the rainbow to culture. And we don't use it as an excuse to be cruel. We receive it the way God gave it: as a sign of covenant mercy.

So the next time you see a rainbow in the sky, stop. Don't just post it. Stop and worship. Thank God for keeping His covenant. Thank Him that Jesus was pierced for your transgressions so that you could walk in newness of life. Let the rainbow pull your heart to God.

Because every time you see it, you're looking at His signature. His promise. His covenant that will not break.

Conclusion

You've seen what God does in Genesis 9.

He anchors new beginnings in worship. He restarts what sin ruins with grace and guardrails. He promises what we can't secure. He signs what He swears with a rainbow in the sky.

And all of it points to one truth: God keeps covenant.

Just like Noah who was delivered from God's judgment through the ark, so have you—if you're in Christ. God delivered us from being lost without Him into a new life in Jesus. And Jesus continues to carry us through the storms of life.

Let me speak to three groups.

For some of you, you've just come through a storm. Think about your most recent storm. On the other side was day one of your new season. The storm ended. God brought you through. And now you're standing in something new—perhaps a season you didn't choose.

Maybe it's the divorce papers you never thought you'd sign. After the counseling. After the prayer. After you did everything they told you to do. And now you're wondering if God can really restart a life this broken.

Maybe it's the diagnosis the doctor delivered in that cold exam room. The one that split your life into before and after. And now every morning you wake up in a body that feels like a stranger.

Maybe it's the pink slip. The betrayal. The city you had to move to when everything fell apart. The dream that didn't just fail—it died in your hands.

And you're standing in the wreckage asking, "Can I trust God with this?"

Genesis 9 says yes. Not because you're strong enough. Not because you've figured it out. Not because you won't fail. But because God has made a covenant with you. He has bound Himself to His word. And what He promises, He performs.

So here's what you do this week. Before you check your phone Monday morning, build an altar. Stop and worship God. Give Him the first part of your day. Worship anchors you when everything else is shifting.

For some of you, you're in a storm right now. Whether it's of your own making or it was thrust upon you, you can't see the other side yet. And you're wondering if God is even there. If He even cares. If He's going to deliver you or leave you drowning.

Here's what I need you to hear: God will deliver you into your new season. You can, and you will, begin again. Stronger. Wiser. More resilient. Not because you earned it. But because God keeps covenant.

He hasn't abandoned you. He hasn't forgotten you. And He will bring you through.

So this week, when that voice says, "What if I can't hold this together?"—remember Genesis 9. God said, "I will never destroy the earth by flood again." Not because Noah was strong enough. Not because humanity got better. Because God keeps His word.

And the same God who made that promise to Noah is holding you together right now.

And for some of you, you're in a hopeless storm. You don't know Jesus. And the ark you're on—self-will and determination—can't save you. You're trying to control your way through life, and it's exhausting. It's not working. And deep down, you know it.

Here's the truth: You need what only Jesus can give you. Not advice. Not motivation. A new heart.

Jesus died on the cross to take the judgment you deserved. He rose from the dead to offer you the life you could never earn. And if you put your hope in Him today, you will experience what Noah experienced: deliverance. Salvation. The assurance that God will carry you through every storm.

So build the altar—worship God afresh. Trust the promise. Stand under the rainbow and be encouraged.

God keeps covenant. And He's offering you a new beginning today.

This sermon was preached at Bridge Fellowship Church in Raleigh, NC. For more resources, visit bridgefellowshipchurch.com.