

## Small Group Guide: "Succeeding in 2026"

**Opening Question:** If you could do one thing from 2025 (or the previous year) over again, what would it be and why?

**Opening Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we thank You for bringing us together today. As we gather to discuss and learn from the sermon on starting fresh, help us to open our hearts to your Word and the new beginnings you offer us. Guide our discussion, inspire our thoughts, and lead us towards a future filled with Your presence and purpose. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

### KEY SERMON POINTS

#### Main Idea

This message reminds us that God is more interested in our future than our past. We explored four practical steps toward experiencing a fresh start in 2026: stop making excuses, take inventory of our lives, refocus our thoughts, and trust God to help us.

#### Takeaways

1. God specializes in new beginnings - Your past doesn't define your future when you're walking with God.
2. Real change starts with honesty - We must stop making excuses and take responsibility for our part.
3. Awareness precedes transformation - Taking inventory helps us see where we really are, not where we think we are.
4. Your thought life shapes your whole life - Protect and direct your mind toward God's truth.
5. Lasting success comes from God's Spirit - We can prepare and take steps, but transformation comes from trusting God.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Stop Making Excuses

1. Why do you think it's so easy for us to make excuses rather than take responsibility for our choices?
2. The sermon mentioned three reasons we make excuses: We don't plan ahead, We don't listen to others, and We give up too soon.
  - Which of these three resonates most with you, and why?
3. **Read Proverbs 28:13.** What's the difference between concealing our sins and confessing them? Why does confession lead to mercy and progress?
4. Personal Reflection: What's one excuse you keep making that's keeping you stuck? What would "one action step" look like to counter that excuse this week? If you feel comfortable, share with the group.

#### Take Inventory of Your Life

5. The sermon gave us four areas of life to evaluate: God, People, Calling, and Joy. Why is it important to periodically assess these areas rather than just pushing forward without reflection?
6. Without oversharing, which of these four areas (God, People, Calling, Joy) feels most out of balance in your life right now?
7. **Read Proverbs 4:25-26.** What does it mean to "give careful thought to the paths for your feet"? How does awareness lead to change?

### Refocus Your Thoughts

8. How have you seen the truth of this statement play out in your life: "The way you think determines the way you feel, and the way you feel determines the way you act"?
9. **Read Philippians 4:8.** Why do you think Paul gives us specific categories of things to think about? How is this different from just trying to "stop thinking bad thoughts"?

### Trust God to Help Me

10. **Read Zechariah 4:6.** What's the difference between trying harder and trusting deeper, and where might God be inviting you to rely on His Spirit instead of your own strength right now?

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (Choose 1 or 2 that apply to you.)

1. **Identify and Replace One Excuse.** Name one excuse you've been using and take one small action step to move past it this week.
2. **Complete the Life Inventory worksheet** (text "INVENTORY" to 925-625-9500 or find it on the website under "Reading Plans").
3. **Confess, Don't Conceal.** Bring one hidden or minimized issue into the light through prayer or trusted conversation.
4. **Replace One Thought Pattern.** Identify a negative thought you dwell on and intentionally replace it with God's truth (Philippians 4:8).
5. **Choose Trust Over Effort.** In one area of struggle, stop trying harder and begin trusting God's Spirit to work.

### MEMORY VERSE for the Week:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; The old has gone, the new has come!  
(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

**Closing Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You for doing a new thing in our lives. Help us to stop making excuses, to honestly assess where we are, to fill our minds with Your truth, and to trust You deeply. We surrender this New Year to You. Make us a new creation in Christ. Give us courage to take the steps You're calling us to take. In Jesus' name, amen.*