

**Receive Before You Resolve**  
Starting Blocks Week 1: Luke 3  
January 6, 2019

Welcome/intro/vision

Great week to join us, first week of a new year and this is the first week of a new series called “starting blocks”

Many of us make resolutions in January or at least try to take advantage of a new year to make some new decisions or have some desire to see some changes or grow in some way

My resolutions over the years have mostly had to do with exercise, which I’ve regularly failed at along with much of the rest of America

The other one has been finding a hobby—that one you would think wouldn’t be that hard but for some reason that one is just as elusive as the others! Maybe I need a hobby tutor! Maybe some of you who are much better at that hobby thing than I am could help me here.

And of course studies show that most of our resolutions don’t last very long. One article I read said that January 12<sup>th</sup> was the day most of us start to fall off whatever wagon we’ve tried to ride—6 more days!!

So since the window is so small for us to deliver on our resolutions, we thought we’d do a series called Starting Blocks to help all of us to get off to a great start in the New Year to deliver on changes we’d like to make or see

When we decided to do this series, we didn’t realize the window was so small! But on the plus side, if we can just keep you going to next Sunday, apparently we’ll have already made a dent in the problem!

To help us get out of the starting blocks well, we’re going to look at the first months of Jesus’s public ministry

At about age 30, Jesus starts a completely new season in his life—Jesus moves from total obscurity to about 3 years of public ministry that has literally changed the world

But as he gets out of the gate at the start of his ministry, Jesus bumps up against the same kinds of challenges that many of us will face when we’re trying to start something new

Jesus is going to face all sorts of temptations and challenges at the start of his new season that would have derailed most of us

So we’re going to study how Jesus got out of HIS starting blocks without stumbling in part for us to continue to get to know and appreciate Jesus who isn’t just nice, he’s brilliant

And if you’re not super-familiar with Jesus, we’re so glad you’re here and this is a great series for you to join us.

Hopefully this will help you to begin to understand why Jesus has literally the single largest following in all of history

And secondly, we're going to study how Jesus got out of his starting blocks so that we might learn principles that can help us to also get out of our own starting blocks without stumbling as we get started in a new year

Today we're going to really start at one of the most core issues that most of us get wrapped up in and trip over even apart from any sort of effort to make a change in our lives

And the issue Jesus is going to help us to tackle today is that ***so many of us confuse what we do with who we are and who we are with what we do.***

That might be a job like a dentist --Let's say you're a dentist and you've got a growing practice—and you know that actually NOBODY REALLY likes seeing you!

But you fight through that by saying to yourself I'm not just a dentist, I'm a good dentist, I've got a SUCCESSFUL practice even if nobody likes coming to see me! That's how I know I'm valuable or important

We could also confuse who we are with what we do in other ways:

It could also just be that you're the guy or the woman who knows stuff, you know lots of stuff, that's who you are, the know-it all person, you crush it at Trivial Pursuit

Or maybe you're the person who knows how to have fun—you're the fun aunt, the fun uncle, the fun friend, that's your name

Or you're the person who fights for what is right or true or good, you get behind the right causes and you make the world a better place

I'm a fighter for what's right, that's who I am.

I'm a church guy, I genuinely like people and I genuinely like helping people

And for me, I'm tempted all the time to find my identity in being good at helping people and

That's how I know that I'm valuable and important

Nothing wrong with being a dentist and nothing wrong with enjoying helping people, but here's the problem

When we confuse what we do with who we are then ***[therefore] our sense of who we are and our peace with who we are gets tied up with our performance or the results of what we do***

And WHEN, not if, we experience disappointments or failure or setbacks, then our sense of who we are can take a huge hit and for some of us we can begin to tumble into the abyss as a result

All of us have some desire to answer the really basic question of who we are—key question for all of life

and one of the easiest and most convenient ways for us to answer that question is by grabbing a hold of what we do and asking our work to answer that question for us

But what if there was a better, stronger, more certain identity that was available to you that was way more stable and much less variable than your performance and the stuff that you do?

And what if you getting out of the starting blocks well in 2019 starts not with better external goals, as important as those are

but right here with a new, deeper center. With your identity rooted in something more eternal, more centered and settled answer to the question of who you are?

What if the key to a new start in a new year is a new way of understanding what God says about you and letting that re-shape how you relate to all the stuff that you do?

That's what we're going to see as we come to Jesus's very first starting block, his first public act in Luke 3

Some quick context: Jesus had a cousin named John who was born a couple months before he was

And his job was to go ahead of Jesus and prepare the way. John was an unusual character, he lived out in the desert and was kind of a crazed prophet

But the people were desperate to hear from God and John had a clear message from God that the people should turn back to God and as a symbol or sign of that turning they should be baptized in water

So the people are flocking to see and hear John and to be baptized, and in Luke 3 we get our first glimpse of Jesus as an adult as he joins the crowds

***21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: " \_\_\_\_\_ "***

Now I want us to play a little game that I often like to play around here that I call **Bible Mad Libs**—what kinds of things could be in this blank?

Remember: This is the very first adult, public thing that we have record of in Jesus's life.

He's about 30 years old, total obscurity, getting ready to start a new season of his life that if he does it all right will change the world forever

God has sent Jesus to do the biggest and hardest job ever in history!

And if God is going to speak a voice from heaven over Jesus straight out of the starting blocks to the hardest and biggest job in all of history, what kinds of things could he have said?

If God was like a college football coach God might have given Jesus the equivalent of an inspirational pre-game speech and finished with a rousing call to action, ***“Game on!”***

If God was more like your mother, God might have said, ***“Just do your best and we’ll be proud of you no matter what.”***

If God was more like your boss who called you in at the start of a new big project, he might have laid out ***“Here’s our goals, objectives, and action plan (and don’t blow it)”***

All three of these have to do with the work ahead and what Jesus needed to go and DO— nothing wrong with that necessarily

But what that could have done was feed into our confusion that what we do is what defines us

God doesn’t want Jesus to have any confusion about that. God in no way wants Jesus to conflate or merge or confuse WHO he is with WHAT he’s been sent to do

And so God gives Jesus a great gift here at his public inauguration ceremony, here’s what God says over Jesus:

***“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”***

There is absolutely nothing in here about the work or task ahead, even though the work ahead is great.

And even more importantly, God speaks this word over Jesus BEFORE he does ANYTHING at all to earn it or deserve it

Jesus is going to do miracles and give amazing talks and sermons and ultimately is going to follow God’s orders all the way to the cross, all amazing stuff that Jesus will DO

But before he gets to doing ANY of it, God speaks this word of affirmation and love and identity: ***“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”***

Jesus has done nothing except get dunked by his cousin John and God speaks this word of affirmation and identity over him

This runs counter to how life usually works!— If your boss gave you a promotion and a raise BEFORE you went and earned it, what motivation would there be to go and do the work?

Y

ou don’t get the title, you don’t get the reward or the affirmation BEFORE you do the work-- You’ve got to go out there and EARN it!

Pretty much the whole of American capitalism runs on the reality that people won't work unless there's rewards waiting for them on the other end of that work

But God here relates to Jesus in a completely different way: BEFORE and APART FROM any of your performance or work, God gives Jesus his identity and his love that is not conditional on anything Jesus has done or will do

Capitalism works okay given that we're in a fallen and broken world, but God's GRACE economy runs in a completely different direction

And the good news for you and for me this morning is we're invited to participate in God's grace economy as we share in life with Jesus

Jesus has come to die on a cross and rise again so that you and I might hear this same voice over us

this voice that tells you that you are God's son, God's daughter, whom God loves, with you God is well-pleased—this is the truest answer to the most important question of who are you?

And that is your name and your truest identity APART from anything you do BEFORE anything you do

and here's the best news of all: because of Christ's death and resurrection to forgive us our sins, it's even true IN SPITE OF all the STUPID things that we have done or will do.

Here this morning, we are here to follow Jesus in participating in God's GRACE economy

And if we're going to participate in God's GRACE economy we're going to have learn a different way of understanding how *who we are* and *what we do* all relate to each other

In 1981 the movie Chariots of Fire was released—it was based on a true story about two runners in the 1924 Olympics from Great Britain—white guys in short shorts running in slow motion

One man is named Eric Liddel and he's a strong Christian, the other man is named Harold Abrahams

And they have two very different ways of approaching the exact same race and the exact same work

Abrahams quote is this: ***I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. But will I?***

Eric Liddel's quote about the same 4-foot wide corridor and the same 10 seconds has a very different angle:

***I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.***

I want to suggest to you that these are the two basic options we have in Western culture when it comes to finding our identity:

It's either looking to justify our existence and building our identity around our own performance, and this by far is the most familiar and most popular and normal approach

The second is much harder, much less common but I would argue much more fruitful and healthier and more in line with who God intended us to be in the first place

That we run and work and perform not in order to find our identity or to justify our existence to but as people who are ALREADY beloved, people who ALREADY know who they are and are living out their God given calling with joy and under the umbrella of experiencing God's pleasure over us as we go to WORK doing whatever it is God made us to do!

Let's look at this 10-seconds to justify your existence bit because it's so pervasive and so the default posture for most of us that most of us really need help to understand why we should even try to live any other way

Let's call this **Performance-Based Identity**—you are validated by how well you do in whatever arena or work or task you take on or happen to attach yourself to

**Pros: very motivating!** When everything about you is on the line in whatever it is you do, you're really motivated to work hard!

**Cons: you either fail miserably...**

That is, if you fail, YOU are a failure. Our failures haunt us and plague us and undermine us. Failure--that becomes your name.

All of us fail eventually at something that matters to us, and when our identity is hooked into our performance everything is always on the line, YOU are always on the line

Some of us have failed at something in our lives and it spiraled us into a season of real depression and despair

Not a chemical or clinical depression but a circumstantial and situational depression because all of you was hooked into all of whatever it was you were working on

When your identity is based on your performance, you either fail miserably OR

**...OR you succeed even more miserably**

Some of the most impossibly difficult people in many of our lives are the most successful people.

They're GREAT at what they do and therefore IMPOSSIBLE to live with or relate to personally,

They often think that because they're great at work they're great at everything and therefore often can't take correction, can't hear that they made a mistake

They sometimes feel very free to offer their opinions or advice in areas that they know absolutely nothing about

**Ultimately: innately unstable, insecure, anxiety-producing, and extremely vulnerable to the winds of circumstances**

I've got 3 kids age 15, 13 TODAY and 11

And one sign that gives me hope that they're not completely lost causes is they've got a rabidly fond affection for the classic cartoon strip Calvin and Hobbes

Here's a classic that starts with Calvin the son asking his parents a very good question as they **drive over a bridge:**

Calvin: how do they know the load limit on bridges dad?

Dad: they drive bigger and bigger trucks over the bridge until it breaks

Then they weigh the last truck and rebuild the bridge.

Calvin: Oh. I should have guessed.

Mom: Dear, if you don't know the answer just tell him!

To borrow an analogy from a friend of mine, **what if there's only a certain weight limit on the bridge of what you do?**

**And what if your identity is way too heavy a freight to try to drive over the bridge of what you do?**

Ultimately, having your identity and my identity and our sense of value and worth tied up in our performance is like driving your life on a bridge that is not strong enough to hold it.

It's just a matter of time before the whole thing collapses

**At Jesus's** baptism, Jesus's good Father is setting him up for the most consequential three years of human history

This three years of Jesus's life are going to touch and change more lives than any other life in all of history—and it's not going to be easy at all—full of challenges and threats and temptations and trials

And even with all that pressure and even with all that opportunity ahead

God is NOT going to set Jesus up with a relationship to his identity where he feels like he's got 10 seconds to justify his own existence every single day or week of his life

God isn't going to set Jesus up for a lifetime of understanding himself that's built on his own performance

Instead, God is relating to Jesus in the grace economy.

Before Jesus runs any race, God is pleased with Jesus. Before Jesus performs any miracles, Jesus is God's one and only eternal Son

Before Jesus wows any crowds, Jesus is beloved.

And from that place of abundance and provision and blessedness, Jesus can go to work. From that place of belovedness, Jesus is free to run and feel God's pleasure

Jesus isn't scurrying about trying to prove himself or justify himself or earn anyone's approval or earn God's love—at every turn he feels God's pleasure, over and over and over again as he obeys at every turn over and over and over again.

He's already GOT God's approval, he's already GOT God's love, his name and his identity have nothing to do with miracles or crowd-gathering so therefore he's free to do those things or leave those things behind, whatever it is God would have him to do

He doesn't need the crowds or the healings or the miracles to know that he is valuable and loved and approved of, he's ALREADY content in being valuable, loved and approved of so he can do all of it without getting overly hooked into any of it

Jesus lives the most audacious and most humble life in all of history

He declares that he himself is the path to reconciliation with the God of the universe, which is about as audacious as you can get

And yet even people who aren't Christians have studied Jesus and admired him for his tremendous humility and selflessness

How do you live BOTH audaciously AND humbly all at the same time? When you know you're already perfectly beloved by God and you don't need external things to prop you up, you can do just about anything.

It all starts right here, at the starting blocks, for Jesus in his relationship with God that is not based on Jesus's performance but on God's gracious, extravagant love

What's at the center of Jesus' life is not himself or his performance or what other people think about him, what's at the center of Jesus's life is what God says about him here in this moment

And THAT's what equips him to live the single most consequential life in all of history

And what happens from here in both Jesus's teachings and the teachings of his first followers in the rest of the New Testament is there's an invitation to share in Jesus's life, in Jesus's identity, in Jesus's belovedness

The New Testament declares that when we're baptized we're baptized into Jesus's baptism, and we share in his identity as a child of God, beloved

This morning, God declares over his children, "You are my son, my daughter, whom I love, with you I am well pleased"

And so this morning those of us who have been joined with Christ are invited to go live like you're already beloved! You're a son or daughter of the most high God with NOTHING to lose and everything already gained for you!

So go to work and feel God's pleasure: make resolutions and go to work making ourselves and the world a better place

And do it just like Jesus did—not because everything is at stake but because we've been so wondrously taken care of

And this morning if you're not yet a Jesus follower, there's an invitation on the table to you to leave behind the performance economy and instead participate in God's grace economy that's been extended to you in and through Jesus Christ

### **Take-WITH: Starting Block #1: Receive before you Resolve**

***How would receiving God's name of "beloved" over you free you to feel God's pleasure as you do what you need to do?***

Whether you're a new years resolution person or not, all of us have areas where it would be good for us to go to work, to grow, to invest in, to get some things in order

By all means, let's all go to work in the new year, but before we do so, Jesus invites us to know our new name

In Christ Jesus, our new name is beloved—you don't have to go to work to earn that name, you're GIVEN that name because of Christ and in Christ

In Christ Jesus, you are ALREADY beloved—so give like it!

Go and lose weight and get in shape as a beloved one. Go and get your finances in order because you are a beloved one. Do a better job with time management and work-life balance because you are a beloved one

Go to work live like a beloved one! This is who we are in Christ Jesus! Go to work and feel God's pleasure, knowing that he delights in you when you do the good work he's prepared in advance for you to do!

And if you're here this morning and don't know this Jesus, don't really know what it is to be beloved by God, and if you haven't yet joined your life to Jesus's life

today the invitation goes out to you

Here's an invitation to build your identity on something much more stable than the fault line of your own performance

Here's the invitation to leave behind the innate exhaustion and instability of the performance economy and instead to step into the grace economy

The God of the universe loved Jesus before he accomplished anything. When we receive Christ and trust in Christ, we're given that same wonderful acceptance and belovedness

Going to give you an opportunity to make a decision today to put your trust in Christ and to enter into God's grace economy in just a few minutes

All of us are looking for something to help us to figure out who we are

And at the same time, in all of our lives, there are places where we need to grow, work that needs to be done, changes that need to happen

Starting block number one invites us to know our true names and to go to work making a difference in our own lives and in the world NOT out of anxiety or fear or pride and ambition

But rather full of the confidence that comes with knowing that we are totally taken care of, and when we go to work doing the good that God calls us to do, we can know and enjoy and feel God's pleasure over us.

COMMUNION TRANSITION

Ready to trust? Go to prayer ministers

PRAYER ROOM OPEN