

MEMORIAL Day

I Love Mom  
Mother's Day

INDEPENDENCE  
DAY

# Seasonal SPECIALS

for  
Children's  
Ministry

HALLOWEEN

VALENTINE'S  
day

Merry  
Christmas

EARTH DAY

HAPPY  
Easter!

All-NEW ideas  
for 13 holidays

# Seasonal SPECIALS for Children's Ministry

All-NEW ideas  
for 13 holidays



Loveland, Colorado  
group.com

## Group resources really work!

This Group resource incorporates our R.E.A.L. approach to ministry. It reinforces a growing friendship with Jesus, encourages long-term learning, and results in life transformation, because it's:



### **Relational**

Person-to-person interaction enhances spiritual growth and builds Christian friendships.

### **Experiential**

What we experience through action and discussion sticks with us up to 9 times longer than what we simply hear or read.

### **Applicable**

The aim of ministry is to equip people to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

### **Lifelong**

Experiences transform the heart, moving faith beyond the walls of church and into everyday life for years to come.

## Seasonal Specials for Children's Ministry

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### **Credits**

Contributing Authors: Lisa Bartelt, Jody Brolsma, E.C. Cunningham, Dawn Rundman, RoseAnne Sather, Patty Smith, Sharon Stratmoen, Adam Walsh, Courtney Walsh, Amy Weaver

Editors: Ann Diaz, Jennifer Hooks, Ali Thompson, Adam Walsh, Christine Yount Jones, Andrea Zimmerman

Cover Art Directors: Rebecca Swain, Joey Vining

Interior Art Director: Jean Bruns

Illustrators: Kate Elvin, Mernie Gallagher-Cole (Portfolio Solutions, LLC), RoseAnne Sather, Rebecca Swain

Production Artist: Suzi Jensen

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# Introduction

Sunday morning often revolves around what's happening during the year, holiday-wise. If kids are decorating red hearts with 1 Corinthians 13:13 stickers, Valentine's Day is probably around the corner. Painting a flower pot? Mother's Day, for sure. And for those who minister to children, the holidays can be the hardest times to find fresh, faith-focused ideas.

That's where *Seasonal Specials* comes in.

We've set about celebrating 13 popular holidays—all from a Christian perspective. You and preschoolers through preteens can blow out each holiday with a devotion, craft, skit, snack, game, song, and outreach idea. That means right now you're holding more than 90 original, innovative, engaging ideas—all stamped with Group's R.E.A.L. Guarantee that these holidays will be more than just a bolded date on a calendar. Instead, they'll be Jesus-centered experiences.

This book covers all the major holidays (Easter, Independence Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day) as well as other celebrations (Earth Day, Memorial Day, and more). Each holiday's section has fresh ideas that inspire, educate, and celebrate.

You'll find the holidays arranged chronologically, so finding exactly what you're looking for is a cinch. You can use an entire section as a full lesson, or simply pick and choose elements to add to a lesson. Here's an example of the elements you'll find in each chapter.

## NEW YEAR'S DAY

**Pressing On** (Devotion)

**New Year's Crackers** (Craft)

**Do-Over** (Game)

**New Life Gingerbread People** (Snack)

**A Clean Heart** (Skit)

**Jesus Makes All of Us New** (Song)

**Book Beginnings** (Outreach)

Each element includes Scripture, age recommendations, supplies needed, easy-to-follow instructions, and great questions aimed at helping kids explore what they experience.

Jesus used what was around him to teach people about God—including daily life and seasons. He told parables about the harvest, fig trees, and mustard seeds, all in conjunction with what was happening on the calendar. *Seasonal Specials* is designed to follow that model, while making holidays incredibly special—and meaningful—for kids.



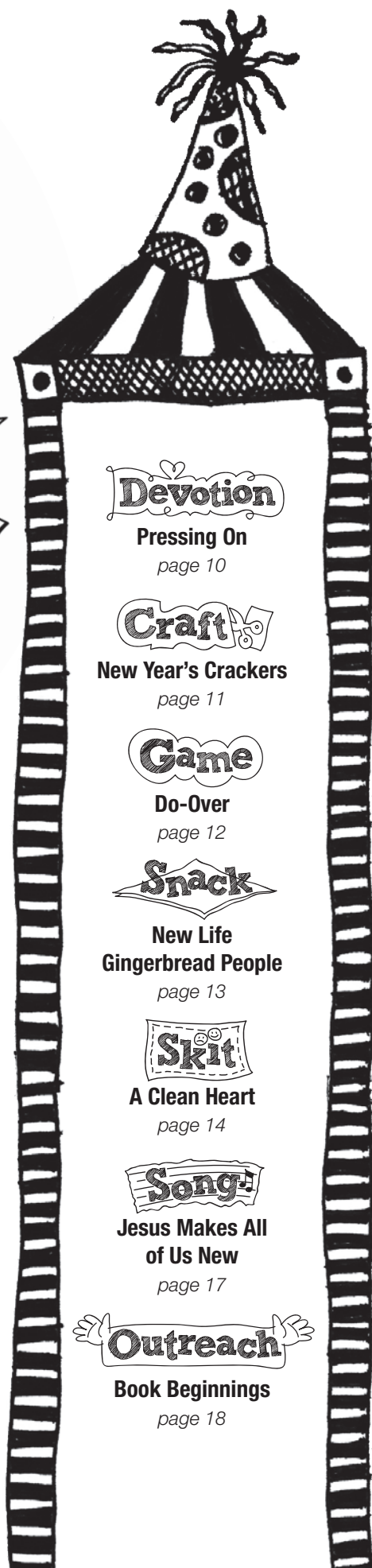
Be aware that some children have food allergies that can be dangerous. Know your children, and consult with parents about allergies their children may have. Also be sure to read food labels carefully as hidden ingredients can cause allergy-related problems.







**N**ew Year's Day...new beginnings...a collective do-over. It's the time of year for genuine reflection, slate-wiping, and, interestingly enough, oatmeal. (January is National Oatmeal Month...a good start-your-morning resolution to begin!) As you celebrate a new year, kids will discover how, through Jesus, they're new creations...blank blackboards, ready for God to chalk some love on their hearts.



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## PRESSING ON

*Kids will learn to move on from the past and press forward for Jesus!*

### SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:13-14

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bible
- a sign with last year's date
- a sign with this year's date
- tape

## The Experience

Hang your signs on opposite walls, and clear the area between the walls of any obstacles.

Have kids face last year's sign.

**SAY:** Let's reflect on the past year. Raise your hand if you've done what I call out.

- Who went to a different state last year?
- Who got a new brother or sister last year?
- Who did something you were proud of last year?
- Who did something you regret in the last year?

**SAY:** We've all done things we regret. Maybe we did something embarrassing, or maybe we really hurt someone by our actions. Sometimes the memories of those regrets stick in our minds and make us feel bad. Getting stuck on what we did in the past can really mess up how we feel about the future. I'll show you what I mean.

Have kids continue facing last year's wall and walk until they're standing right up against it.

**SAY:** Your goal is to race across the room, but you have to walk backward, keeping your eyes on last year. If you bump into anyone, fall down, or peek behind you, you have to sit right where you

are, so be careful! Allow a few minutes for kids to play. Declare the winner and then have kids sit in a circle.

**ASK:** What was hard about racing backward?

- Tell about a time you were focused on a mistake or bad choice you made—and it caused a problem for you.
- How can remembering our bad choices help or hurt our future?

**SAY:** It's good to learn from the things we've done wrong. But when we hold onto guilt or bad feelings, we forget that God has forgiven us. We can get stuck in the past, thinking God doesn't love us anymore. But the Bible has something important to say about holding onto the past as we go through life. Read Philippians 3:13-14.

Have kids all start back at last year's wall.

**SAY:** Let's put this verse into practice. Rather than focusing on what's behind us (last year), let's look toward what's ahead. Turn around and race toward the sign for the new year. Ready? Go!

When all the kids are at the new sign, declare them all winners.

**ASK:** What does it mean to "press on" for God?

- How can you live for Jesus this year?

**SAY:** A lot of people make resolutions on New Year's Day. We vow to do things such as get more exercise, read more, or eat healthier foods. Those are all good goals. But the most important goal we have is a lifelong one: to live for Jesus. If we live every day with our eyes focused on him, we'll have fewer regrets each year. And we'll also know that Jesus forgives us for the wrong things we do when we ask him to. So don't dwell in the past—just keep your eyes on what Jesus has in store for you this year!



# NEW YEAR'S CRACKERS



Kids will make a traditional New Year's craft as a reminder to live for Jesus in the new year.

## SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 5:15-16

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bible
- paper towel or wrapping paper tubes cut to 12 inches
- colorful paper
- metallic pens
- safety scissors
- colorful tissue paper
- metallic ribbon
- candy
- clear tape
- shiny stickers



## The Experience

Before kids arrive, cut tissue paper into 12-inch by 20-inch strips. Cut metallic curling ribbon into 12-inch lengths. Cut colorful paper into 1x4-inch strips. For younger kids, write or print the words from Ephesians 5:15-16 on the strips of paper.

**SAY:** Happy New Year! People around the globe celebrate the arrival of a new year with lots of traditions.

**ASK:** What New Year's traditions does your family have?

**SAY:** All over the world, people celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. In England, they share something called party crackers. Party crackers are tubes that make a big pop when you open them. Inside you'll find a message, treats, and a paper hat that looks like a crown. We're going to make our own New Year's crackers with an important message to



share about how to live for Jesus in the coming year.

First, we'll work on our message. There's a great Bible verse that can help us know how to live for Jesus this year. Read aloud Ephesians 5:15-16. Pass out the slips of colorful paper and help kids each write this verse on a slip using metallic markers. Then have them tuck the papers in their paper towel tubes.

**ASK:** What do you think this verse means?

• What does it mean to "make the most of every opportunity"?

**SAY:** Now let's make a paper crown to tuck inside. This is part of the English tradition—people all wear the hat they find inside the cracker! Our crowns can remind us that when Jesus is king of our lives, we live for him.

Show kids how to cut out a piece of tissue paper that will fit around their heads with a few extra inches left to overlap and tape. They can cut scalloped designs along the top to look more crownlike. When they're done, have kids gently fold the hats to fit into the tubes.

Help kids wrap their tubes with tissue paper and tie one end with curling ribbon. Then have kids put some candy in the tubes along with the paper slips and crowns before tying off the other end. Kids can decorate the outside of the tubes with metallic markers or stickers.

**SAY:** Take your party cracker home with you. As you celebrate New Year's this year, crack it open. Read the verse and enjoy the sweet candy

with your family as you pray for God's help in making the most of every opportunity in the coming year.





Kids either get a “do-over” — or they don’t—when aiming paper airplanes at a target.

## SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:17

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- sheets of paper
- masking tape

# DO-OVER

## The Experience

Give each child a sheet of paper to fold it into a paper airplane. (For younger kids, demonstrate how to make a paper airplane or let kids just crumple their papers and throw them like a ball.) Once kids have created their planes, use masking tape to make a square target on the floor several feet away.

**SAY:** The goal of this game is to land your airplane or ball inside the square. Without allowing any time to practice, have kids take turns trying to land their airplane or ball inside the tape square. If the plane lands right side up, say, “Do-over!” and let the child try again until he or she hits the target or the plane lands upside down. (If kids are throwing balls, allow every other child who misses a do-over.) If a child’s plane lands upside down, that child doesn’t get another chance. However, don’t explain *why* certain kids get a do-over and others don’t until the end of the game. Note: Kids may get frustrated that some people get a second chance and others don’t; that’s okay—it’s part of the experience. If you have time, play again.

**ASK:** What does it mean to get a do-over?

- How did you react when you either got or didn’t get a do-over in this game?
- Talk about a time someone gave you a do-over in your life.
- If you could have one do-over in real life, what would you do over and why?

**SAY:** New Year’s Day is a time to remember the past and look forward to the future. It’s a fresh start and a chance to do-over the things we’ve messed up. God offered us the biggest do-over ever when he sent Jesus. Because Jesus died for us, we get a second chance. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Bible says that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. Out with the old, and in with the new! Our sins are wiped away, like wiping clean a chalkboard. We can start fresh. Let’s fly into the New Year thanking God for giving us a second chance.

## NEW LIFE GINGERbread PEOPLE



*Kids discover that no matter how messy life gets, they get a new start with Jesus.*

### SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:17

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bible
- 1 gingerbread person per child
- paper plates
- plastic knives
- white frosting
- Bugles snacks
- Fruity Pebbles cereal
- M&M's candies or yogurt-covered raisins
- plastic spoons



### The Experience

Give each child a gingerbread person on a paper plate, and set out the supplies.

**SAY:** Use the supplies to decorate your gingerbread person. But you have to do it with your eyes closed. Allow time; then have kids open their eyes.

**ASK:** What do you think of your gingerbread creation?

• How does a messy gingerbread person remind you of what we feel like when we've done something wrong?

**SAY:** The Bible says we've all done wrong things. On the inside, we've all looked like a messy gingerbread person. But listen to this! Read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:17.

**SAY:** Let's make our gingerbread people into new people, just like Jesus did for us. As we start this new year, we can celebrate our new life in Jesus. Have kids scrape off their frosting and decorations. Then have kids keep their eyes open and redecorate their gingerbread people.

Have kids put a Bugle "party horn" in the gingerbread person's mouth to remind them to celebrate new life in Jesus. Then let kids eat their gingerbread people.

**ASK:** How will you live life differently this year knowing that Jesus made you a new person?

**SAY:** All we need to do is ask, and we'll belong to Jesus. That means we're new people! Remembering what Jesus has done for us can help us remember to live like we're new this year.



# A Clean Heart

Kate learns how God erases sin.

## SCRIPTURE

Psalms 51:10

## PROPS

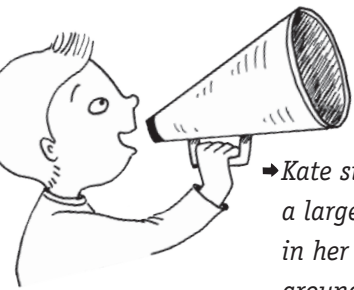
- a chair
- a stethoscope (toy or real)
- a large ball
- black tape

## CAST

- Jesus
- Kate

## BEHIND THE SCENES

This is a simple setup with just a chair for Kate, set on one side of the stage. Kate holds a ball with two black strips of tape stuck to it. Jesus wears a stethoscope.



## Action!

→ Kate sits in the chair. She's waiting, and has a large ball covered with strips of black tape in her hands. Jesus enters with a stethoscope around his neck.

## JESUS

Okay...Kate? Is Kate out here?

## KATE

That's me.

## JESUS

You're up next!

My notes say you have questions about your heart.

→ Kate stands. She starts to hold out her ball with the black tape on it, but she pulls back. She's a bit hesitant.

## KATE

Yes, but...I'm not sure what's going to happen.

## JESUS

Oh?

→ Kate looks at the ball.

## KATE

My mom says God looks at our hearts. And I'm not so sure mine is okay. She says he forgives us if we do something wrong—just wipes our heart clean.

## JESUS

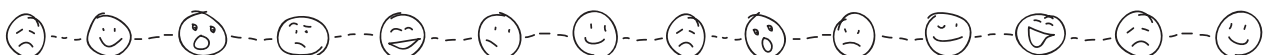
Right. Your mom's one smart cookie.

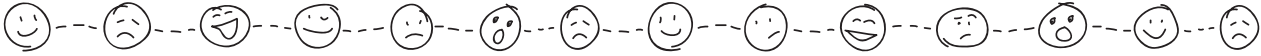
## KATE

But I don't get it.

## JESUS

It's just like she says. Wiped clean. Kind of like a do-over. Like New Year's Day, new year, new things, starting over... like that.





## KATE

So, if I do something wrong, and I ask God to forgive me, then that thing I did just...goes away?

## JESUS

Well, yes. He forgives you. Gone. Adios.

→ Kate hands the ball to Jesus.

## KATE

Will it hurt?

→ Jesus smiles, reassuring Kate.

## JESUS

It might. There might be things you don't want to admit or don't want to talk about. Are you ready?

→ Kate looks at Jesus as if to say, "Do I have to?" Jesus nods and smiles. He points to a specific piece of black tape.

## JESUS

Let's start here. What's this one?

## KATE

(Hesitant) I lied to my mom.

## JESUS

Oooh. Not the best idea. Hold still.

→ Kate stands completely still, eyes shut in a wince, as if waiting for something to hurt. Jesus pulls off the tape in one swift motion, as if quickly pulling off a bandage. Kate slowly peeks out of one eye at Jesus.

## KATE

That...wasn't that bad.

## JESUS

Great! But...that's not all of it. Your heart still looks like this. (He points to another piece.) What about this one?

## KATE

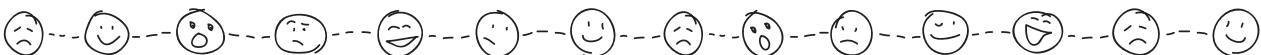
That one I don't really want to talk about. It's going to hurt.

## JESUS

God wants to help you with everything, Kate. Even the hard stuff.

## KATE

Well, I'm not forgiving him! He did it on purpose! He hurt my feelings! He made fun of me in front of my friends!







---

**JESUS**

---

I know it's hard. Maybe you want to get back at him. But that's not how God does it.

---

**KATE**

---

But my brother was wrong!

---

**JESUS**

---

And you still need to forgive him.  
(Pauses.) Are you ready?

→ Kate gives a big sigh. She looks at Jesus.

---

**JESUS**

---

Remember, it'll be like New Year's Day every day.

---

**KATE**

---

(Grimacing) New Year's Day every day...

---

**JESUS**

---

Fresh start. Clean heart. Just like New Year's. Ready?

---

**KATE**

---

Ready.

→ Jesus pulls off the piece of black tape.  
Kate winces like it hurt a bit, but then breathes easier.

---

**KATE**

---

Wow. I feel a lot better. You were right. Thanks.

→ Kate turns and starts to leave.

---

**JESUS**

---

I'll be here to help whenever you need me. Oh, Kate?

---

**KATE**

---

Yes?

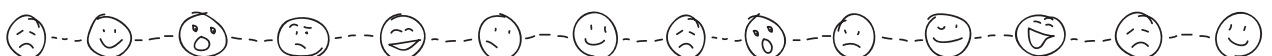
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**JESUS**

---

Here's your heart back. Good as new.

→ Jesus hands Kate the ball. Both smile.





# JESUS MAKES ALL OF US NEW



Kids dance and sing as  
they give everything to  
Jesus, to the tune of the  
"Mexican Hat Dance!"

## SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:17

**Sing It!**



**When we give all our heart to**  
*(Kids jump and shout)* **Jesus!**

**When we give all our mind to**  
*(Kids jump and shout)* **Jesus!**

**When we give all our soul to**  
*(Kids jump and shout)* **Jesus!**

**Jesus makes all of us new!**



**And then Jesus will give you a new life** *(Kids do-si-do  
around each other, arms linked)*

**And then Jesus will give you a new life**

**And then Jesus will give you a new life**

**Jesus makes all of us new!** *(Kids throw arms up in air.)*





# BOOK BEGINNINGS

*Books will get new life as kids  
replace tarnished covers.*

## SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 43:18-19

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Bible
- clear packing tape
- brown paper grocery bags, brown shipping paper, or wrapping paper
- scissors
- staplers
- cotton swabs
- rubber bands
- glue
- markers
- stickers
- clear contact paper

## The Experience

In early to mid-December, publicize your need for donations of worn, tattered, and used children's books. Set up a box at church or school (with the school's permission) to collect the books. Establish a cut-off date for donations a week before you intend to make repairs on the books. Also, find a children's reading group in your community. Many communities have programs through the library, school, or other charitable organizations to help kids practice reading.

Sort the donated books by the repair they need—such as torn covers, loose spines, loose pages, missing covers, and so on.

Sit in a circle and **SAY:** **A new year means new beginnings—a great time for a fresh start! Here's what God has to say about new beginnings.** Read Isaiah 43:18-19. **Today we're going to give some books new beginnings. We'll repair their covers, and then find new homes for them.**

Divide tasks, according to age group if necessary. Repair the books as needed.

Loose pages, depending on the type of book, can be reattached by stapling, taping, or gluing. When using glue to reattach pages or covers, use cotton swabs for tight places, such as bindings. Then wrap rubber bands around the books and let them sit overnight.

For torn and missing covers, let the kids have fun decorating their own replacement covers using the paper bags and wrapping paper. Follow these steps for making new covers for books.

**1.** If using paper bags, cut them so they lay flat. Cut from a top corner straight to the bottom, and then around three sides of the base of the bag. Then cut off the base and lay the bag flat. If kids will decorate the outside, make sure the plain side is facing down. If using wrapping paper or a roll of shipping paper, roll out a large piece and lay it flat.

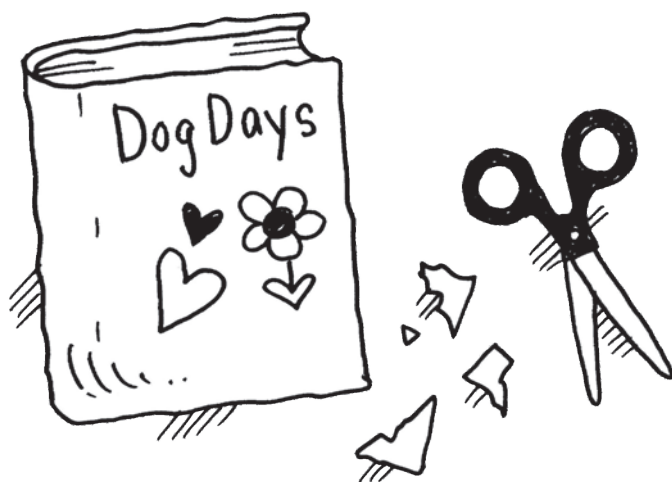
**2.** Choose a book and lay it in the center of the bag or paper. Fold the bottom up to meet the edge of the book, and crease the paper or bag. Repeat at the top. Remove the book and finish the fold so you have two pieces the length of the paper folded over at the top and the bottom.

**3.** Place the book in the center of the paper, on top of the folds, and position it until the left and right sides appear to be equal. Fold paper over the front cover so both sides are even.

**4.** Fold the left side over and inside the front cover. If the paper is too long, trim so it covers about three-fourths of the inside cover. Insert the cover into the flap made by the folds. Close and pull the paper tight around the front cover.

**5.** Repeat Step 4 for the back cover. Fold the right side over and inside the back cover. Trim if necessary. Insert the back cover into the flap.

**6.** Decorate the outside with markers, crayons, and stickers. Don't forget to include the title of the book! Reinforce the cover with clear contact paper or by sticking tape to the inside flaps.



## Extra Special FACTOIDS

### DID YOU KNOW...

The ancient Babylonians were the first to make New Year's resolutions... about 4,000 years ago. Their most common vows for the new year? To "return borrowed farm equipment and pay off old debts."

### DID YOU KNOW...

Tampering with the calendar had become common practice in various societies. In 153 B.C., the Roman senate declared a fresh start: January 1 would begin the new year. In 46 B.C., Julius Caesar declared another do-over but had to extend that year to 445 days to synchronize the calendar with the sun.







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