

Living a Life Without Regrets

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Text – 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 7:10

Introduction

When I was growing up, I remember my mother saying, *Live your life so that at the end of it you'll have no regrets*. Is living life without regret an oxymoron? Is it even possible? How often do we wish we could do parts of life over? As simple as wishing our last spoken word could be undone. All of us have done things that we wish we could do over. It may be an action that hurt us or someone else. It might have been a bad financial decision or relationship. Maybe it was some words we wish we could take back. Whatever the case, what's done is done. Right? Well... not exactly! All too often our lives are held captive by the actions or experiences that we regret.

I knew someone who had a very simple mission statement. It was: "*Don't screw up.*" Easier said than done! We're all fallible creatures and we all "screw up". We all have regrets. As we grow older and more fully appreciate the mistakes we have made and the opportunities we have missed, the more there is to regret, at least potentially. Many of us regret what we shouldn't and don't regret what we should. Some of us hold onto deep and consuming regrets that burden our lives, cripple our relationships and hobble our future. You can't change the past but you can ruin the present by worrying about the future. How can we live without regrets when everyone has them? Everyone has regrets. But not everyone can overcome them, even when they interfere with our ability to function and enjoy life. How can we learn how to let go of: 1) past mistakes, 2) lost opportunities, and 3) failed expectations to live richly in a present filled with hope and new possibilities?

Two key questions: What are regrets and how can we overcome them?

Regrets are defined as unfulfilled or unattained intentions or goals that a person wishes they had had the courage or time to pursue at a previous time in their life. A regret is feeling troubled, sorrow or remorseful over something that happened or something we have done or left undone; it comes in many shapes and sizes.

Consider the following: *Seven Categories of Regret*:

1. Acts you committed (but wished you hadn't)
2. Acts you didn't commit (but wish you had)

3. Acts others committed (that you wish they hadn't)
4. Acts others didn't commit (that you wish they had)
5. Circumstances beyond our control (but not God's control)
6. Inevitable losses – like the death of a loved one (that you regret)
7. Comparisons between individuals (that lead you to regret)

Are you living in a land of regret? If you're living with regrets today about: 1) roads not taken, 2) old decisions made in haste, or 3) things you've longed to attempt but were afraid to try, then by God's grace, it's time to start living in the: No Regrets Zone.

We can discover a way out of the pain, guilt and shame of the past.

We can learn how to create a rich and rewarding life in the present.

We can also take steps to minimize regrets in the future.

What can we do to move forward? We need to learn the steps to deal with regret and to ultimately leave regret behind. This involves identifying component parts of regret: 1) Looking at our role in creating the regret; 2) Identifying those we've hurt; 3) Identifying those we blame; and 4) Understanding the consequences of holding on to regret.

There are three basic biblical components of learning to live a life without regrets: 1) Learning to resolve the Past, 2) Living proactively in the Present, 3) Leaning with vision into the Future. Let's consider these three, one at a time.

I. Dealing with the Past

What are some of the things that trap us in our past?

1) Lack of forgiveness: The refusal to forgive can keep us trapped in our regrets.

2) Secrecy: Often the thing we regret is also something we're embarrassed or ashamed about. As a result we hide it rather than expose it. The problem is, the secret keeps us enslaved. Getting things out in the open helps defeat the power that the past has over us. Scripture teaches us that, if we cover our sins, we won't prosper, but if we confess and forsake our sins, we will obtain mercy (Prov. 28:13).

3) Toxic thought patterns can create and support our regrets. People who deal subjectively rather than objectively with anger may blame others for things for which they themselves are responsible.

There are three ways we need to deal with the past:

1) Learn valuable life lessons from the past. God doesn't want us to waste the pain of making mistakes, but if we fail to learn from our past, we not only waste that pain but we are more likely to repeat the same mistakes in the future. One of the most valuable lessons we can learn from the past is the connection between thoughts, words, attitudes and actions and their consequences. It is foolish to do otherwise!

2) Forgive the past and receive God's forgiveness. We need to: a) stop blaming; b) stop trying to get even; c) stop holding past actions against others. We need to

honestly admit where we have fallen short and, by faith, receive the grace of forgiveness. We also need to forgive those who have hurt us. If we fail to ask forgiveness either to God or others we have a bad conscience. If we fail to forgive others, we poison our own soul (angry, bitter, resentful).

3) Forget the past: It's time to let go of our painful memories, past mistakes and lost opportunities. Letting go does not mean denying the regret or the circumstances that created it. Nor does it mean minimizing the serious effects of the regret: the pain, the harm and the fear it caused. Rather, it means coming to terms with the actions and circumstances that created the regret, releasing the painful emotions associated with it and ending the serious distortions that the regret was creating in our life. The thing about regrets is that ultimately it's our decision whether we regret or not. It's our choice to be held captive by our past or not. To move forward we have to make a decision to let go of the past. If we don't do this we'll live to regret it!

II. Living in the Present

If we would live a life of no regret, we must learn to live in the present; we must learn to live purposefully. We must learn to live proactively and seize the day – “carpe deim.” If we want to have no regrets at the end of our life that means we have to live each day of our lives with no regrets. But how? The answer is: proactive, godly Christian living: this life style involves doing three things: doing God's will, God's way, for God's glory. We know we are living and working without regrets when we are fully engaged, alert, alive and enthusiastic about one thing: pleasing God! Pleasing God is something that we can and must learn. How? By God's Holy Spirit. Where? From God's Holy Word.

When we are proactive in our life 1) problems are seen as possibilities, 2) obstacles are seen as opportunities to learn and occasions to do things differently and better. What could be possible for us if we were living a proactive life? How would we better develop or more fully utilize the spiritual gifts and natural talents God has given us? What is the major obstacle standing between us and a life without any regrets? Could it possibly be our lack of faith in God and commitment to God? Think about your life, where are you proactive and where do you need a jolt to get you going?

Consider the following – Strategies for Proactive Living – faithful and wise stewardship: First we need to be filled with God's Word and controlled with the Holy Spirit.

1. Commit Yourself to Proactive Living: This is the only life you have. Life isn't a dress rehearsal. Life is not a spectator sport! Make an agreement with yourself that you are not going to sit this one out, commit to being a participant, not an observer. Commit yourself to the process of finding and following God's will for your life!

2. Identify Past Successes: Make a list of significant moments in your life where you took the initiative to do what God wanted you to do. How do you feel when you know you are doing God's will? GREAT! For example, how did you feel when God

gave you an opportunity to share your faith and you took the initiative and did it?
GREAT!

3. Don't Make Excuses – accept personal responsibility. Excuses keep you from doing what God wants you to do. Excuses keep us from becoming the kind of person that God wants us to be. For example, is there 1) a health challenge you're not addressing, 2) a relationship that's not healthy, 3) a home full of junk that's interfering with productive living? If you are not being proactive in life then you are being reactive.

4. Identify Godly Proactive People: Make a list of godly people you are acquainted with that live life proactively. These are the kind of people you want to be your mentors, spend time with, collaborate with, pioneer with and play with.

5. Record Valuable Life Lessons: Some Christians keep a journal or a spiritual notebook to reflect on and learn from the past and to seek God's will for the future. Write these things down and then at the end of the week reread your journal and see if there are any common threads or directions that need further exploration.

6. Overcome Your Fears: Life can become boring and we can lose the zest for living if we allow ourselves to get into a rut. Routines can be healthy but ruts can be deadly. Once in a while be willing to get out of your comfort zone. Don't let your present fear paralyze you. Living a life without regrets may mean courage to do something new.

7. Get Into Action: Once you commit to proactive living, (living without regrets) the only thing left to do is get moving, get working on it, get going. In other words, DON'T PROCRASTINATE! Write out your life purpose, your annual goals and your daily do list and get to work. Start small with little steps, and as momentum builds you will find yourself naturally engaging fully in life, naturally not holding back. As you begin this new lifestyle, watch closely and notice what's different about your life. Let others around you know that God has the final say in your life.

8. Make Wise Decision Daily: Life is all about making good decisions. (See the Daily Dozen Decisions for Devoted Disciples, listed below.)

Finally, if we would lead lives without regrets we must learn to *lean into the future*. What does that mean? It means first and foremost, living in light of eternity.

III. Leaning into the Future

One of the ways to live a life of no regrets is to begin with the end in view. It is sort of cliché to do this exercise: Imagine yourself at the end of your life: How do you want to be remembered by those you love most. What do you want on your tomb stone? How do you want your obituary to read? What are the things that are the most important to you? What things are you the most happy about having done? What things do you wish you had done, but now regret that you didn't?

Now take the answers to these questions and make sure you do them! Have you ever done this exercise? I have, it's not easy but it's worth the effort. I believe I will have succeeded in life if: "*those who know me the best, love and respect me the most.*" If we don't have a biblical definition of success, we will live to regret it. Don't

be like the businessman who said, *"I spent my whole life climbing the ladder of success only to reach the top and discover that it was leaning up against the wrong wall."*

God has given us a unique *"life message"* called the testimony of God's grace in our lives that He wants us to share with others. What if we don't share this message? One word: regret. No one else can feel inside of you for you and no one else can speak the words on your lips and offer what you have to share concerning your experience of God's grace. We all have unique testimonies that we need to share!

Mother Teresa said: *"We can do no great things; only small things with great love."* Do something with great love. Perhaps it's the amount of love we are able to give in our small acts that makes them so meaningful to us and others. Let's never forget, it is the love of Christ that makes things great!

Are you a dreamer living your life with regrets? The future belongs to those with a vision of what God wants them to do and be. Are you making progress in becoming the kind of person that God wants you to be and accomplishing the goals that God leads you to set? Then, you need not lead a life of regret.

Living a life without regrets is possible if we let God define and determine our future. We must have His goals, values, priorities and methods. Living without regret requires making wise decisions about the future and it being committed to those decisions. (Only one life, it will soon be past, only what's done for Christ, will last!) Are you living each day to the fullest, without regret? Are you doing God's will God's way for God's glory?

How do you live out a God-given vision or live out your life mission statement?

1. Write out what God wants you to do in a simple phrase or sentence or page.
2. Focus on that God-given vision' Paul said, *"This one thing I do" (not these 40 things I dabble in)*. He also said, *"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."* Focusing on the vision keeps you on the right path. Without vision we perish.
3. Make a plan. Sometimes a life mission seems overwhelming but by making a plan and taking small steps we can move forward. Break it down into small pieces so that you can define do-able steps. Find the actions you can take and take them!
4. Celebrate Victories. Keep a journal of what God has enabled you to do but always give Him the credit. It's always encouraging if we can see we are making progress.
5. Develop a daily strategy for living. Ask God each morning what He would have you do and 1) write it down, 2) prioritize it and then 3) do it! I have done this for years and it's invaluable. At the end of the day, review, reflect, revise and reschedule for the next.
6. Live in gratitude in response to God's grace. Be thankful most of all 1) for the grace of Christ, 2) for the abundant life of love that He gives, and 3) for what He enables us to accomplish for Him and include them in your journal as well.

7. Commit to a Christian Community that will help you discover and do God's will. We all need a reality check and it's a fact that it takes others to bring out the best in us. We all need good mentors and healthy role models.

These seven steps will keep your life moving in the direction God wants you to go.

In the end what really matters? That God's grace is greater than all our sins! Living without regrets is living with the clear commitment of doing God's will, God's way, for God's glory. By clearly visioning and writing down what God wants you to do, you create a means of continuous inspiration. As you begin to make measurable progress in your spiritual life, God will use you to inspire others to do the same.

Living a life without regrets doesn't just happen. It takes intentional action on our part. Living life with the intention of knowing and doing God's will is living a life that's pleasing to God. And if our lives are pleasing to God, we will have no regrets. If we live our entire lives for this world only we will have an eternity to regret it.

Here's my CLOSING CHALLENGE:

1) No reserves—Sacrifice yourself (Rom. 12:1). Offer your entire being (body, mind, and soul) to God as a living sacrifice. Allow Him to use you as He desires, and discover His perfect will for your life.

2) No retreats—Press on (Phil. 3:14). After totally surrendering to God, you will face distraction and discouragements that will make you want to revoke your sacrifice and not follow God's will. Stay focused on God and rely on His resurrection power to reach forward for what lies ahead.

3) No regrets—Finish the course (2 Tim. 4:7). Offering yourself unreservedly and unrelentingly requires great faith. But God honors your faith, and He will help you fight the good fight so that you can live without regrets and one day hear Him say: *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matt. 25:21).

As you pray, 1) offer yourself completely to God as a living and holy sacrifice and 2) ask Him to transform you into someone who displays more and more the character and the conduct of Christ – all for His glory. Amen!

Daily Dozen Decisions for Devoted Disciples:

1. Attitude: Choose and display Christ like attitudes daily.
2. Priorities: Determine and act upon Biblical priorities daily.
3. Health: Know and follow healthy guidelines daily.
4. Family: Communicate and care for my family daily.
5. Thinking: Practice and develop good (godly) thinking daily.
6. Commitment: Make and keep proper commitments daily.
7. Finances: Make money ethically and biblically manage money daily.
8. Faith: Deepen and live out a vital Christian faith daily.

9. Relationships: Initiate/invest in loving/truthful relationships daily.
10. Generosity: Plan for and model a generous, Christ-like spirit daily.
11. Values: Embrace and practice biblical principles and values daily.
12. Growth: Make progress in the process of sanctification daily.

A Commitment to Courage and Holy Boldness

If we would learn to lead lives without regrets then we need to develop the courage to act on godly (biblical) convictions – we need holy boldness. What are some of the elements that contribute to developing holy boldness?

- 1) A commitment to obey Christ at all costs
- 2) A clear vision of the Kingdom of God
- 3) A strong motivation of Christ's love for us
- 4) A burden for those who are spiritually deaf and blind
- 5) A strong belief in moral absolutes
- 6) A thirst for righteousness and a hatred of sin
- 7) A clear understanding of the nature of evil
- 8) A confidence that what we have to offer will benefit others
- 9) A deep respect for God and His Word
- 10) A desire to be controlled by God's Spirit