

“Let It Go”

May 26, 2019

STOP IT! In the Name of Love series – Memorial Day Sunday

You don't have to look very hard to find stories of regret. Even this week as I waited in the checkout lane, the headlines of the magazines promised tales of celebrity regret and drama. Sure, it's easier to read about others' struggles, especially those who are in the public eye and whom we might assume to be without difficulties, but our own spirits are burdened with what might have been and what we wish was different.

Regret is a common denominator. Take a look:

SHOW MEDIA: “Regrets” - NARRATE

For the past two weeks, we've focused on gossip and bullying or being mean - behaviors that hurt others and stand in direct opposition to God's call to us to love one another as Christ loves us. But we also reminded ourselves that these behaviors are destructive to our spirits.

Today we focus on something that can hurt us deeply if it takes over – regret. And regret can also hurt others around us because we can get stuck. Regret can hurt our witness as followers of Jesus because we can become so stuck that we question God's love for us and God's grace and forgiveness.

What we have to be clear on is the difference between repentance and regret. Repentance is a part of our life of faith. It's central to our relationship with God. Repentance, at its root, begins with God's grace that moves us to seek God and recognize our need for God. We call that prevenient grace that “comes before” and helps us to respond to God.

Repentance is the act of turning from sin and turning to God. It's a change of heart, mind, and even action. Repentance requires us to be honest about our sin and our need for God to save us because we cannot save ourselves. God reaches out to us with love that restores our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and we continue to walk with God in forgiveness and grace with the Holy Spirit as our guide.

Repentance looks forward with hope because of God's love for us, but regret is different. Regret may be a part of our movement to repentance, but it's not the end. It's not a place to stay. Even though we may feel regret when we come to God, we don't get stuck there. We can be honest with God and know that God is faithful to forgive when we are truly seeking God and turning to God.

While repentance ultimately looks forward, regret only looks back. Regret invites us to carry the burden of the past without a lot of hope for what lies ahead. It can be

incredibly destructive to our spiritual lives because we're hanging onto past sins rather than offering them to God and finding freedom in God's grace and forgiveness.

Hanging onto regret is a struggle for many of us, and it can be especially damaging to our spiritual lives and our witness to the power of Jesus to bring new life. Someone described regret as "mining our mistakes" - continuing to dig a bigger and bigger hole where we eventually get stuck and can't see a way out. **SHOW SLIDE:** *Don't cling to a mistake just because you spent a lot of time making it.*

It's probably even easier for us to think of a time of regret than it is to think of a wonderful moment in our lives. Regret is powerful. It can be a great teacher and motivator, but it can also keep us from experiencing the fullness of God's love in Jesus Christ - and the fullness of life as a gift of God. Just like carrying a heavy backpack, regret can keep us from the blessings of God. **SHOW SLIDE:** *You can't reach for anything new if your hands are full of yesterday's junk.*

We learn from mistakes, but to get stuck in regret doesn't show the power of God to love and forgive. Regret can be damaging when it turns into a constant focus on what was done and keeps us from re-engaging in life. That's not God's desire for us. So how do we hear the call to "let go" and allow God to bring healing and peace?

We have many examples in our ancestors in the faith. Many of them had reasons for regret, but they also had a sense of God's forgiveness. King David's desire for Bathsheba created a painful family drama, but we have his sincere repentance in Psalm 51, which offers us an opportunity to pray.

Peter was clear that he would remain faithful to Jesus, but was quick to deny that he even knew Jesus. When Jesus came back to his disciples after his death and resurrection, he specifically offered Peter forgiveness, which changed his life. Peter went on to become a powerful witness to the world.

The apostle Paul, too, is a powerful example of the power of God to bring us to repentance instead of looking back with regret. Paul was a persecutor of Christians who became a leader among early Christians. His words to the people at Philippi are a testimony and a way that he wants to encourage them to support each other, invest in the community of faith, and remember that Jesus is the one who brings them together.

All of them have something in common - honesty and humility. We need to be honest about the "misses" in our lives - mistakes, missteps, misunderstandings - those times when we got it wrong. We've all had them, and sometimes there are consequences - both short-term and longer lasting.

There's not one of us who doesn't regret something we've said or done (or maybe didn't do!). Regret is a powerful force in our lives, and I can hear myself saying, "I wish I wouldn't have..." or "I wish I could go back and do that differently..."

James is clear about our need to come to God in honest prayer - even to grieve and cry about our need for God's help. He calls us to humility - to remember that we need God because God is good and able to save us from sin and death and save us for eternal life. But we don't need to be defined by the past. Regret doesn't need to take the front seat and steer our course.

One of the tenets of our faith is the truth of God's steadfast love and the gift of second chances. That doesn't mean that we won't have broken relationships with people we love or struggles to heal. **SHOW SLIDE:** *Moving on doesn't mean you forget about things; it just means you have to accept what happened and continue living.* It doesn't mean that healing and reconciliation will come quickly - maybe not even in the ways we hope - but it does mean that God is always with us and seeking to help us understand that we're loved no matter what. It means that God is working, even in difficult moments.

Hear from the prophet Isaiah, who spoke to the Israelites in a time when they were in exile - far away from home - maybe even struggling with what had been. **SHOW SLIDE:** Isaiah 43: 18-21 (NIV)

¹⁸"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. ²⁰The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, ²¹the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

Can regret help us correct something or motivate us to act differently - even to learn something? Absolutely! But it can't be the place we stay. God doesn't desire that we keep looking back on what was or what could have been. We're called to keep looking ahead, trusting that God will guide us into the future with hope. **SHOW SLIDE:** *Your journey will be much lighter and easier if you don't carry your past with you.*

God gives us the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ - the Risen One - whom death could not stop. His saving love is a powerful force - much more powerful than regret. And the freedom he offers us true and real and available to us.

We're invited this morning to pray, and especially pray about our personal struggles with regret. Our Praise Team will offer a song called "Come as You Are," and the words encourage us to open our hearts to God in prayer. If you feel led to come forward for anointing, you can feel free to do so. You can share a specific prayer or simply say, "God knows."

Let us pray...PRAYERS of the PEOPLE, HEALING PRAYER, & the LORD'S PRAYER