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Will My Regrets Ever Leave Me Alone? (Part II)

Acts 22:19: (NASB) *And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you.*

Regret can be a killer! We often carry around and dwell on regrets from some of our past experiences. Not only do we dwell on them, but we sometimes build those regrets into shrines of discontent and sorrow that overrun our present and then take hold of and manipulate our future. Pretty nasty, huh? On the other hand, if we know the secrets of managing regret, it can become a tool of peaceful acceptance for our present and a deep personal motivation for our future. How do you change from one result to the other? A few weeks ago, we began unveiling the powerful biblical lessons on managing regret and today we get to finish that unveiling!

We need regret! Regret is a vitally important part of our lives, and we should not seek to be rid of it. Having said that, let's clarify... **Regret, while necessary, should not be a destination; rather, it should be a tool of motivation.**

Being sinful makes us do things we end up regretting. To put regret in its proper perspective, we turn to the Bible and specifically to the Apostle Paul, who, when he was known as Saul, did much he later regretted. **(Please see Part I of this program from April 3, 2016, for more on Paul's life.)** His conversion and recounting of that conversion teaches us how to put our own regret in perspective, just like Jesus taught him.

There is a very distinct formula given to help us and the first part of this program discussed the first three principles. Let's go over those briefly:

REFOCUS REGRET PRINCIPLE #1:

ACCEPT AND EMBRACE THE PAIN OF WHATEVER IT IS YOU REGRET

REFOCUS REGRET PRINCIPLE #2:

ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR WRONG THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

REFOCUS REGRET PRINCIPLE #3:

APPLY FAITH AND THEN APPLY TRUST THAT WE ARE FORGIVEN, AND THEREFORE IN A POSITION FOR SPIRITUAL GROWING AND NOT EMOTIONAL GROANING

Here is where many of us lose the battle of regret and end up wallowing in the mire of self-pity and guilt. **How did Paul avoid the deadly choice of wallowing?** Acts 26:15-17: The amazing thing about regret and this account of Paul's past is that Jesus taught him step-by-step how to manage his regret. Jesus did this because he needed Paul. Paul was to be an integral link in the gospel plan and needed to be able to thoroughly focus on the challenges he would daily face. **Paul needed his regrets to be tools to use and not weights to tow!**

Those last verses explain the necessary steps of FAITH, TRUST and FORGIVENESS in the face of regret. FAITH and TRUST can only feed FORGIVENESS when:

A. You know who is dealing with you: *And I said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.* Saul's experiences of perpetrating evil came to this - he had been persecuting his own Messiah, his own Savior and he now knew it. Our sinful actions and the resulting regret are in their appropriate place when they are placed before Jesus OUR Savior. None of us will receive a vision in a bright light from Jesus on a road like this. Instead, we have the written words of Jesus in the Scriptures. His words, actions and example "speak" to us and show us who we are dealing with - the son of God, the immortal divine being at the throne of God, who wants our lives to be in accordance to what he and the Father have called us.

B. Faith is put into action: *But get up and stand on your feet.* Faith is not just a thrill for the heart or an exercise for the intellect; it is a transformative conviction: *Get up! Stand on your feet!* Once we have accepted and embraced the pain from the cause for our regret, and once we have assumed full responsibility for it, faith REQUIRES us to stand up! **To stand in faith** is to accept and stand upon the gift of forgiveness. **To be forgiven** is to have your sins put away from you by God Himself through Christ. Standing on this foundation enables us to have healthy regret.



To **stand** is to act. Saul/Paul was not the only one pressed into service by such a command: Acts 10:17-20: Faith has to be applied first; then trust can follow. You cannot truly trust something in which you do not have faith. Trust is the heartfelt application of faith. Mastering this piece of the regret management puzzle affirms a new direction - regret can now work for us.

C. Faith is based in humility so that it can be redirected: *For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you.* Forgiveness and grace overflow with this proclamation from Jesus to Saul, a perpetrator of evil. Jesus saw the potential of Saul because of Saul’s heart. Jesus saw past the darkness and evil that Saul was on his way to commit and redirected him onto a path of honoring God who he was in the process of mocking. Saul was unkind, unjust and unscriptural - even to the point of murder. A miraculous act of forgiveness is shown in these verses. Saul realized the error of his ways and instantly changed his direction. Jesus instantly forgave him! The forgiveness could not happen without humility.

Being re-directed is never easy: John 21:17: Peter had denied Jesus three times. After being raised from the dead, Jesus came back to Peter and redirected him three times. In looking at himself, Peter has a lot of regret and bitterness he has to get over. Jesus had to reassure Peter, then he had to re-affirm the reassurance that Jesus loved him and trusted him. It takes great humility to be redirected. Humility may not naturally come to us. It is a decision to see ourselves for what we really are. We want to put ourselves into a position of being pliable for the service of God. This decision must be made again and again.

To humbly be redirected is to accept the miraculous grace of forgiveness: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29: Think about how much forgiveness and grace overflow from the proclamation of this text! We, like Saul of Tarsus, have been drawn up and out of the mire to freely and fully serve our God.

D. We trust based upon our faith: Faith is the foundation. Faith accepts forgiveness; trust is the building. Trust applies forgiveness to our deepest and most mortifying sins and circumstances. Trust is not a topical ointment! Trust is faith deeply applied in a mature fashion. Jesus showed Paul his need to build a secure trust upon his faith: *...rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you.* Jesus foretells Paul of the life-threatening trials he would have and the corresponding trustworthy protection that Jesus would provide him. **Trust is faith deeply applied in a mature fashion with expectation and peace.**

David displayed faith and trust in his regretful confession: Psalms 51:5-9: Not only does the trust clean us, but it *makes us to hear joy and gladness*, to come up out of the mire of misery and smile from within because we are forgiven. We can trust in Him. We can bring praise, honor and glory to the Heavenly Father, even though we make mistakes. Regrets unchecked have a mind of their own, but regret dealt with through biblical principles can be the mind of Christ. This step of applying forgiveness, faith and trust is perhaps the most difficult step of all, for it is in the taking of this step that we consciously redirect our regret. It is here that we take the pain, the consequences and the backlash of our sin and apply it to living rather than dying. It is here that we look our regret in the eye and solemnly proclaim it to be a tool of spiritual life in the hand of God rather than a destination of spiritual destitution.

REFOCUS REGRET PRINCIPLE #4:

ADAPT - CHOOSE TO WALK THE SPIRITUAL PATH OF SACRIFICE THAT YOUR WRONG ACTIONS CAN NOW INSPIRE YOU TOWARDS AND NOT THE HUMAN PATH OF LEASE RESISTANCE

Now that we have applied forgiveness, faith and trust, we cannot simply sit still in the vacuum of that application; rather, we have to live the proof of it. Forgiveness is just the beginning and not an end result. Now we have to “walk the walk,” “talk the talk” and live the life of a faithful follower!

Jesus continues to show Paul what life would now be about: Acts 26:18: Jesus is saying, “Show others what I am now showing you.” Let’s break this down phrase by phrase, as his words are so profound that examining phrases at a time will be beneficial.

Look at the description Jesus gave Paul about the path he was to walk: *...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light* - Saul had just been blinded by light, and in that



physical blindness he was able to see pure light and truth for the first time. His mission was to aid others who had been living in the blindness of sin as he had, so that they also might see as he now did. *...and from the dominion of Satan to God* - Paul's mission was also to show the way to the dominion of God from the dominion of Satan. Who better to do this than one who had done such wrong, who had fallen into Satan's hands and who now would have so much to regret? Because he had so much to regret, he would have so much to live for! That is an important point we miss if we allow our regrets to manipulate and overrun our lives. *...that they may receive forgiveness of sins* - Forgiveness is built on faith and trust. Paul was being heartily forgiven, and he would stand on the power of that forgiveness for the rest of his life. Who better to walk others towards the miracle of forgiveness than one whose sins were so spiritually dark and utterly regretful? Jesus helped Paul use his regret as a tool, teaching him all the ways his former darkness could create light for others. *...and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me* - Paul was one of those sanctified by faith. His faith, trust and forgiveness would throughout his life absorb the deadly poisons of his regret and turn that regret to constructive energy for Christ. Paul's path would now be fully adapted to doing only the will of God and NOT using the name of God to do his own will. There is a big difference between those two things!

King David also adapted his will and way towards God. His regret was strong, but rather than it feeding upon him, it was made to feed his godly devotion: Psalms 51:10-13: David adapted his life back to God. Beyond asking for a sense of joy, he prays, *sustain me* in order that *he could teach transgressors Your ways*.

Paul and David showed us the power of refocused regret, but it did not come easily or naturally to either of them. They had to carefully build their determination on the faith and forgiveness of God and then adapt themselves to a new path. Our path - our example of sin, regret, forgiveness and action - can inspire others as well. Are we willing to walk this path as well, where our regrets can push us forward instead of pull us back?

People we witness to can take courage when they see our mistakes and they can follow our example and overcome something similar. It involves transformation - being accountable, accepting the pain of the experience, assuming the responsibility and adapting ourselves to a new path.

REFOCUS REGRET PRINCIPLE #5: ATTACK THE FUTURE - NOT THE PAST - WITH THE LESSONS LEARNED, AND WITH FORGIVENESS, FAITH AND TRUST APPLIED!

Attack can sound like a harsh word and often it does depict harsh actions. We often attack our past with our regret, and the result of that attack is to ravage the present and ruin the future.

The need to “attack the past away” is removed if we exercise the previous four principles in place to refocus our regret: Accept the pain, Assume responsibility, Apply forgiveness, faith and trust, Adapt to a spiritual path. Now the past is a valuable tool put in place to attack and alter the *present* and therefore *unveil* the future. Attacking the present means attacking the *sinfulness* of the present to make it God-glorious. We can regret what we did *not* do and for times we did *not* take action, opportunity or responsibility. If we apply these five principles to what we regret in our past, they automatically (if we allow them to) make us look at our present with different eyes of opportunity.

The Apostle Paul attacked the present: Acts 26:19-20: *I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision* - Before the heavenly vision, Paul as Saul only obeyed the darkness of his own actions. When the vision came, he recognized it and followed it.

Paul's previous life as Saul the persecutor was indeed a driving force of his ministry - regret refocused in a positive way! His message was one of Christ, spoken with the conviction of one whose own life had been mercifully ripped from the jaws of Satan's lies and brought to the privilege of salvation. The Apostle Paul had no time to wallow in his regret.

Acts 26:21-23: *...stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place* - he went from adding onto and bending the Law to do what he wanted to do, to nothing but pure scriptural principles. This is how he was *not disobedient to the vision*. He focused on saying what the Scriptures and Jesus told him...period!



Paul would brush against death many times throughout his ministry, yet he never flinched in his mission to proclaim the Gospel or in his devotion to the will of God. Jesus, not regret, was his Lord. Paul's regret now served as a powerful reminder of the angry life he had led and the dark choices he had made. His regret reminded him how that previous life was instantly transformed by grace and forgiveness to a life of loving humility, joyful service and willing sacrifice. His regret now fueled his unrelenting attack on the darkness of sin with the light of the Gospel.

David also learned to dwell in the light of God and use his regretful past for God's glory: Psalm 51:14-17: ...*You are not pleased with burnt offering*. God is not looking for us to serve and honor Him with lip service and rote ceremony. He is looking for *a broken spirit and a contrite heart* - our transformation within our hearts to be godly and not sinful. God can rebuild a broken spirit. If we wallow in our regret, we cannot fulfill this verse. It is a choice and there are five clear steps to make that choice work. It is this broken and contrite heart that reflects our being forgiven, which gives us the ability to refocus our regret. **It does not say we are to have a depressed heart**, but a contrite heart that now has broken open to make room for joyful singing of God's righteousness and praise. If we bring our sins before God and are accountable for them, making right our sins as best we are able and accept forgiveness, God does not want us to be depressed.

Finally, as the Apostle sums up his life, his regret is still obvious and its power is now godly: 1 Corinthians 15:8-10: He did not deserve what he got, but by the grace of God, he was an Apostle and was given unbelievable opportunity. He was kept humble by his past.

The experiences of persecuting, pressuring and punishing the followers of Christ always stayed with the Apostle Paul. Approving the deaths of many saints stayed with him. Consenting to the death of Stephen stayed with him. Paul's past was dark with dishonor and evil, and he had a mountain of regret that he carried for the rest of his life, which Satan could have used to torment him. He tried but could not get through the armor of God's grace and forgiveness. What we do with our regret is a choice.

Paul accepted his actions and assumed their responsibility. Paul was forgiven and applied it. Paul was faithful and applied it. Paul had trust and applied it. Paul, through Christ, had learned to hold onto his regret tightly, for instead of being a destination of destruction, Jesus showed Paul how to adapt his regret into a tool of salvation. Paul wielded that tool for the glory of God and to the honor of Christ as he attacked the darkness of Satan with the light of the Gospel.

Isaiah 40:28-31: In our experiences, we have to learn to wait on the Lord. That is not always simple. Waiting on the Lord means you are putting other things aside in favor of scriptural principles, looking for guidance. He promised to give us strength to get beyond ourselves. Our regrets want to keep us inside of ourselves with self-pity. That does nothing to praise and honor God! It is all about honoring Him footstep by footstep.

You have regrets. I have regrets. How long until we learn to use them to honor God? It is a choice. Do not allow yourself to wallow in self-pity. Win the victory of managing your regrets through Scripture. Follow Scripture, pray and let God guide you.

***So, will my regrets ever leave me alone?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***