

July 27, 2014

Mostly Personal...

Loved Ones,

Regret. What a loaded word! According to Webster's Dictionary, the word means to *feel sorry for something: to feel sorry and sad about something previously done or said that now appears wrong, mistaken, or hurtful to others; to mourn for somebody or something: to feel sadness about something, or feel a sense of loss and longing for somebody or something that is no longer there.*

Regret (perhaps **remorse** is a better, stronger word) is making a comeback. I'm not sure why. Maybe society is just getting older, and my generation is the one that is beginning to wish we'd made better decisions.

Regret is not only sorrow for something we did (*I regret buying that car.*), but also sorrow for what we did not do (*I regret not buying gold when it was \$85 an ounce.*).

In preparation for the 100th birthday of the Assemblies of God, I recently read a couple of books by one of my heroes, Ernest S. Williams. He was General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God from 1929 until 1949. A favorite author of my parents, He was man of such wisdom that many in his day felt the "S" in his name surely stood for "Solomon". I agree. Yet as much as I enjoyed the books, I came away depressed. Not because of his writing, but because for over a year while I was in seminary, I drove past Brother Williams residence almost daily. At 93 years old, he was in a retirement home then, and spent most of his days more or less alone with The Lord and a small circle of friends.

I wanted to visit Brother Williams, to have him lay hands on me, offer a blessing on my budding ministry, and sign my Bible. I never did though. I was afraid I'd bother him. I was afraid he'd not be in his right mind, and I wouldn't know how to handle it. What if the man whose name was revered in my childhood home had become a grumpy old man and had no patience for a young whippersnapper?

I found out later that E.S. Williams was gracious and loving right up until the end. He was a truly kind man and loved it when young preachers came for a visit. I was depressed because of my deep regret for not visiting that man. What a treasured half hour I could have had! What a blessing I may have forfeited!

But there is good news! Regret, even remorse, need not be terminal.

Please allow me a moment to share a few thoughts about regret that may help us through the depression of bad decisions.

1. **Remember, those bad decisions are not the end of the world!** They may be the end of a relationship, a job, or a friendship, but life goes on. In the midst of the worst day imaginable for the nation of Judah, Jeremiah declared, "The steadfast love of The Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, and great is the faithfulness of our God!"
2. **Turn every regret into a learning experience.** Paul Billheimer wisely said, "Don't waste your sorrows!" He was saying that since Jesus died for our sins, He put each of our mistakes into the position of becoming a blessing to us in the long run. When we stumble, we should take note of why and how we stumbled, take note of what we learned, and live life more effectively and peacefully from that point forward. Life is potentially a great compost heap. The garbage of our life can be recycled, reprocessed, and re-presented. What began as garbage can become fertile soil for a productive life.
3. **Don't cave into the agony of defeat.** If you don't get a grip on your regret, it will cripple you for the rest of your life. Did you have a bad marriage? Let healing take place, or you'll spend the rest of your life alone because you're afraid of making a mistake again. Don't get me wrong – you need time and you need to learn why your marriage failed – but then move on!
4. **Remember that God is able to use your pain to help others.** No one understands your trouble like someone who has been through similar trouble. In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul teaches us that God helps us who are in trouble or full of regrets to help others who will come along and are in the same mess we are!
5. **If your regret is connected to sin or destructive behavior – then stop living that way!** I consider myself a very compassionate, sympathetic and understanding person, but I am amazed how many intelligent people keep repeating the same old destructive behavior and sinful lifestyles. The result is a never-ending battle to get out of a vicious, unforgiving cycle of regret. You can't keep living the same way and expect different results.
6. Finally, let forgiveness do its marvelous work. Someone has described the "magical, restorative power of sleep." The same can be said of forgiveness. It is restorative. It is powerful. It may not be magical, but it is supernatural! Let God forgive you. Then forgive yourself. And be sure to forgive others!

Someone recently wrote a phrase that brought tears of appreciation to my eyes: **"Our family loves you to the moon and back!"**

So, I love you, to the moon and back!

Pastor Stephen