

REGRETS

“If you had the chance to live your life over again, would you do anything differently?”

“Regrets? I’ve had a few.” We all have them. In his recent book* our friend Les Parrott says regrets can either (a) poison our daily lives or (b) propel us into a better way of living.

Les recalls Will Rogers who said, “Don’t let yesterday use up too much of today.”

Garrison Keillor’s take -- “Show me a person without regret, and I’ll show you a person with memory loss.”

“Regret” is “a feeling of disappointment, distress or heartache over an unfulfilled desire, or an action taken or not taken.”

Les says it’s healthy to identify what makes us dredge up pain from our past so we can find healing, and move past the past.

He believes “Your present is inextricably linked to your past.” It’s the idea of “Seep and Creep.” As long as we let old regrets seep in, life bogs down to a creep, making us feel unfinished.

There’s medical evidence to back this up, Parrott says.

“Unfinished business takes on a life of its own because the brain remembers incomplete tasks or failures longer than any success or completed activity. When a project or a thought is completed, the brain places it in a special memory. The brain no longer gives the project priority or active working status, and bits and pieces of the achieved situation begin to decay. But regrets have no closure. The brain continues to spin the memory, trying to come up with ways to fix the mess and move it from active to inactive status. But it can’t ---not without our deliberate help.”

Tonight's Big Question is NOT "WHAT do you regret?" Rather it's the more important question: "How do you DEAL with your regrets?"

(DISCUSSION)

Luke 15

"It was the Sabbath, and Jesus had gone to the home of one of the chief Pharisees. Huge crowds had followed him and listened as He spoke. Then Jesus said, 'There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' So the father divided the property between them.

"It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

"That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.'

"He got right up and went home to his father. When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him.

"The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.'

"But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it.

We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

"All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast because he has him home safe and sound.'

"The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!'

"His father said, 'Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours, but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found'" (Luke 15:11-32)!

- What did the wandering son regret?
- What did he do about his regrets?
- What did his older brother regret?
- What can we take away from this story told by Jesus?

Following up a tough-love letter in which he'd recommended how to deal with a disciplinary matter among the believers in Greece in the case of one of the men who was sleeping with his stepmother, Paul writes,

"... you were jarred into turning things around. You let the distress bring you to God, not drive you from him. The result was all gain, no loss. Distress that drives us to God does that. It turns us around. It gets us back in the way of salvation. We never regret that kind of pain.

But those who let distress drive them away from God are full of regrets, end up on a deathbed of regrets” (1 Corinthians 5:1, 2 Corinthians 7:9b-10).

Romans 8

Our pal Paul writes, “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Ephesians 1

“Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we’re a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free” (Ephesians 1:7)!

Les Parrott asks, “How will you know when you’ve reached the place where you want to be with your regrets?” He suggests this as a worthwhile goal: I will have reached the place where “I will value more deeply my imperfect self, flaws and all, by seeing me as my Creator does.”

“In most cases, forgiveness is the only way to release any resentment you may be holding onto.”

Is it time to move past your past? If you’re carrying regrets and guilt, you’ve carried them long enough. It’s time to drop them at Jesus’ feet. It’s time to receive His forgiveness for all your sins and failures, ALL of which have been covered by the price He paid on the cross. He did it.....just for you. With no regrets.

P.S. There’s a very encouraging snapshot in John 8:1-11.

* **Shoulda Coulda Woulda, Dr. Les Parrott, Zondervan, 2003**

His Deal

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