

THE *Wonder* OF CHRISTMAS

Minimize Regrets by Mending Broken Relationships, and Maximizing Your Faith this Christmas Season

“We cannot live a regret-free life, but we can seek wisdom in prayer to make good decisions.” Pablo Diaz

Nobody plans on living or ending life with regret.

- When we are young we don't sit down and make a list of all the regrets we will have toward the end of our lives.
- No matter how many times our parents counsel us as what to do or not do, we do it our way.
- The fact is that we create our lives as we live them.

Someone stated, "I only want to regret the things I did, not the things that I didn't do." ...But all of us have some regret because it comes with living.

One of life's challenges is to make the most of our life and minimize our regrets. We will not be able to live a regret-free life, but we can seek wisdom in prayer to make good decisions in how best to live.

We don't want to come to the end of this year regretting that we didn't spend enough time with our spouse, children, grandchild, or God because we didn't make it a priority.

Let us not wait until the end of the year or the end of life to look inward and pray for discernment and wisdom on how best to live our lives.

- **We must ask ourselves hard and tough questions.**
 - ✓ *Am I making the most of moments with loved ones?*
 - ✓ *Is my life making a difference? Or is it all about me?*

The author of the letter of James in the New Testament, writes, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; God gives generously and graciously to all."

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.

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?

- 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.*

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.*

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.

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.

"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Proverbs 28:13

Be careful with this proposal or suggestion as to how you deal with it. I am a strong believer in confessing to God our shortcomings, our sins, our regrets, etc. However, I am not a proponent of "confessing sins" to just anyone...just "to get it off our chest" (so to speak).

Confess it to God, be repentant...humble yourself before Him...and He hears us and is faithful to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

- 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.
Subjective vs. Objective. Subjective information or writing is based on personal opinions, interpretations, points of view, emotions and judgment. ... Objective information or analysis is fact-based, measurable and observable.

There are three (3) ways we need to deal with the past:

- 1. Learn valuable life lessons from the past.** One of the most valuable lessons we can learn from the past is the connection between thoughts, words, attitudes and actions and their consequences. Choices are involved in each of the four connections above. God gives us ample time and opportunity to choose the right connection leading to our response.
- 2. Forgive the past and receive God's forgiveness.** We need to stop blaming, stop trying to get even, and 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 (anger, bitterness, resentment).
- 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. 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! (Pun intended)

God is eager to hear from you. Call on Him and He will answer!

A broken relationship with others is a shame...but, a broken relationship with God is heart breaking...for yourself and God.

Mend relationships by humbling yourself and admit that at least part of the problem is YOU!

God isn't like us. He doesn't get offended. He doesn't withhold forgiveness. And He doesn't leave. He is here, always, waiting with His arms outstretched. Wanting us to come back to Him.

There are hundreds of reasons why we feel our relationship with God isn't what it should be. There are 4 things we can do to fix a broken relationship with God:

- 1. Pray...**Relationships are strengthened by communication and shared experiences. So communicate with Him. Tell Him about yourself and your life. He is real, and He will hear you. Apologize for the things you feel you need to. He will forgive you. That's what He does. Thank Him for everything good in your life and the bad things, too. The good things are from Him. The bad things bring us to Him. Both are blessings. But most of all, just talk to Him. It doesn't have to be formal or out loud. Talk to Him in a way you are comfortable He will hear you, and you will feel closer to Him.
- 2. Actively Listen...**God is trying to talk to us every day. He has things to tell us, new to share, counsel to give and love to show. When we stop and actively listen to Him, we not only show we care about what He has to say, but we care about Him. We listen by being still, reading the scriptures, or even listening to uplifting music. God speaks in a language we can understand. If you listen, you will hear Him and feel closer to Him again.
- 3. Believe Him...**Trust is a vital part of any relationship. You've seen those trust-falls, where a person closes his eyes and falls backwards into the arms of a waiting partner. So it is with God. We can't see Him, but we choose to believe He is there. When we trust Him, we can turn our weaknesses over to Him and be made strong. We can follow His path for us, not our own. We can let go of fear, anger, shame, guilt, sadness and so much more. Believe Him when He says He loves you. Believe Him when He calls on you to do hard things. Believe Him and fall into His arms. He will catch you, and you will feel closer to Him.
- 4. Tell Him you love Him...**Love is powerful and real. It is a feeling, and also a choice. John said we love God because He first loved us. Yes, we love Him. *You* love Him. So tell Him. God is there, waiting to hear from you and talk to you. He is waiting for you to believe *in* Him and believe Him. He already loves you and is waiting so patiently to be loved by you.

He misses you. He loves you. He needs you. And you need Him.

Living in the Present...

Learning to Live “Proactively” in Lieu of Being “Reactive” to Situations.

To live proactively with minimal regrets, we must learn to live purposefully (Finding purposeful actions and seize each day for good).

How do we do that?

Godly Christian living:

- **Doing God’s will,**
- **God’s Way,**
- **For God’s Glory.**

When we are proactive in our life:

- **Problems are seen as possibilities,**
- **Obstacles are seen as opportunities to learn to do things differently and better.**

Think about your life...what are you doing to be a proactive person and where do you need a jolt to get you going?

Strategies for Proactive Living –

First we need to seriously and joyously study God’s Word (to show yourself approved by God) and then be controlled by Holy Spirit.

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” **2 Timothy 2:15, KJV**

Note: When a person begins being controlled by the Holy Spirit, sin and "death hath no more dominion [or control] over" them. Romans 6:13-14 in the original Bible scrolls states, "Put your members as weapons of righteousness at the disposal [control] of God, for then the sinful nature will not exercise lordship [control] over you."

Now you are ready for action. What to do??

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.*
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. That was in the past and you felt great about it; Today is the 1st day of the rest of your life. Make a list of what you want to accomplish, set priorities, and do it!*

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.*



Going back to dealing with the past regrets...DON'T COMPARE OTHERS WITH YOUR LIFE...INCLUDING YOUR MATE AND YOUR CHILDREN...AND YOURSELF!

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 or at least with minimal regrets may mean courage to do something new.*
7. **Get Into Action:** *Once you commit to proactive living, (minimizing regrets) the only thing left to do is get moving, get working on it, and 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 Decisions Daily:** *Life is all about making good decisions. Finally, if we would lead lives without minimum regrets we must learn to lean into the future. What does that mean? It means first and foremost, living in light of eternity.*

Leaning With Vision into the Future

One of the ways to live a life with minimal regrets is to begin with the end in view.

Imagine yourself at the end of your life: How do you want to be remembered by those you love most. 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!

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.

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 with minimal regrets is possible if we let God define and determine our future. We must have His goals, values, priorities and methods in view (not in the rear-view mirror).

“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 doable 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. **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.*

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.

CLOSING CHALLENGE:

- 1) **Leave No Reserves—Sacrifice yourself** (Rom. 12:1, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”*).
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, *“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*).

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.