

Life's Most Common Regrets

Introduction. A woman sits on her couch staring at the picture of her deceased son. She thinks, "If there were only a way that I could have acted sooner. I might have saved him." A man sits at the kitchen table with his head in his hands. As he reads the layoff notice, he contemplates his family and how they just barely get by now. His thoughts go back to high school and how he could have made something very different of himself and his family would not be in desperate need. The alcoholic lays in the hospital bed, recovering from his second suicide attempt. He wonders where he would be if he had listened to what his parents told him so long ago.

If everyone knew the future their lives would be perfect. Of all the emotions we have to deal with, regret has got to be one of the hardest. Unfortunately, none of us can escape the sorrowful, disappointed feelings caused by the knowledge that the present could have been changed by acting differently in the past.

In Matthew 21:28-32, Jesus told His disciples the parable of the two sons. When the father came to the second son, he said he would not go but later regretted turning down his father and he went to work. The Lord then showed them that the kingdom of God belonged to those who were willing to regret and repent. Avoiding regret can only be made possible by acting now to change your future. You can change your regrets into repentance and your condemnation into redemption.

I. ***"I Wish I Had Put God First Sooner In My Life"***

- A. Elijah had served the Lord since his youth (1 Kings 18:12), and Josiah sought the Lord when he was young (2 Kings 22:1-3; 2 Chronicles 34:3). There is good reason for Proverbs 22:6. Only about 5-10% of the population over age eighteen will ever obey the gospel. If a child does not learn and accept the gospel when they are young, chances are slim they will later in life.
- B. No matter how good the walls are, if the foundation is not strong, the building will not stand. In youth, if the foundation of character is laid wrong, the penalty will surely follow. The crack may appear far down in older age, but it will certainly be there (Ecclesiastes 11:8-12:1).
- C. Humans are naturally inquisitive; that is, we seek knowledge. What better knowledge is there than the knowledge of God? The Lord has made us to seek after Him (Isaiah 55:6-7; Hosea 10:12; Matthew 6:33), and He is not far away (Acts 17:26-27). We have an eternal soul, and a realization that our lives have an eternal purpose (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
- D. One way or the other, whether you like it or not, you will make a decision about serving God and obeying the gospel (1 Kings 18:21;

Acts 22:16). If you regret that you have not acted when you were younger, then take care of that today (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)! If you have the desire to come to God, don't waste anymore time regretting that you had put God first sooner in your life. Start now before it's too late!

II. ***"I Wish I Had Known Then What I Know Now"***

- A. Sir Isaac Newton, after a lifetime of important discoveries in the field of science, said, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem only like a boy playing upon the seashore, and diverting myself every now and then by finding a pebble, or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lies all undiscovered before me." A Christian's attitude of discovery in the word of God should be like his.
- B. In Luke 1:17, the Bible says that John the Baptist will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." We need to be doing the same. Instead of regret because of a lack of knowledge, learn of God and do His will (Philippians 2:16; 1 Timothy 4:6-8; Hebrews 4:12; 6:1). The Bible will guide you better than any other source (parents, feelings, friends, etc.).

III. ***"I Wish I Had Listened To Good Advice"***

- A. Did you ever listen to your parents and think, "These people are crazy," only to come back like the prodigal son in Luke 15:20?
 - 1. Do you think that the young man's father tried to talk him out of his plans? Any father would have. Yet we never want to learn from others who are older and wiser.
 - 2. In our arrogance, we shut our minds and are led to destruction. There is an old saying that goes, "He who can take advice is sometimes superior to him who can give it"
 - 3. People usually live happier lives when they follow the wisdom of the scriptures (Psalm 119:2, 11, 18, 34, 97, 101, 105, 117, 133, 144; Proverbs 1:5-7; 11:14; 13:10; 19:20).
- B. What kind of advice will you listen to? Will you listen to the world who tells you to think about yourself and never about God? Will you listen to the words of Jesus (Matthew 7:13-14)? Paul (Galatians 5:26)? Peter (1 Peter 3:12)? James (James 1:19)? John (Revelation 2:10)?

IV. ***"I Wish I Had It To Do All Over Again"***

- A. If I had a dollar every time I had ever thought this way, I would be doing pretty well. Yet everyone knows that you cannot roll back the clock. Time only moves in one direction. The only time you have to

work with is the time that is right in front of you. Time is the most valuable and the most perishable of all our possessions.

- B. As long as you have time left, you can change and live your life spiritually all over again. Is that not comforting? If you wished you could do it all over again, you can (Ezekiel 11:19-20). You can be born again (John 3:7; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24). This rebirth is attained through baptism (Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5).

Conclusion. Have you ever had any of these regrets? My guess is that you have. Why don't you act today in the present to change the future? If you believe what God has promised to people who do not live righteously, why don't you make the effort to change (2 Peter 3:7)?

I bet the rich man in Luke 16 went through a lot of these regrets in hell as he lifted up his eyes, being in torment and agony, and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. If we could have seen Lazarus here on earth, we would have thought him a pathetic human being, but he had no regrets because his actions in the present secured his future in eternity.

I would hate to be laying in the depths of hell having these regrets (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). That thought just gives me goosebumps all over. The worst thought that would come to my mind is, "I could have changed all of this. At the time obeying the gospel and serving God seemed ridiculous to me, now I just wish I could do it all over again." An old saying goes, "It is better to sleep on what you plan to do than to be kept awake by what you've done."

One of the most descriptive biblical pictures of the Christian life is of an athlete competing in a race. On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds. On August 7, 1954, the two met together for a historic race. As they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead. It looked as if he would win, but as he neared the finish he was haunted by the question, "Where's Bannister?" As he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. Landy later told a *Time* reporter, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won!" Discipline is the key to winning (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-2). The devil wants you to dwell on the past, but you need to look to the future (Philippians 3:12-14). A lot of decisions are difficult and involve the greatest levels of anguish, but this one is easy. Obey the gospel today.