

# BEYOND REGRET

## Philippians 3:7-14



We all have regrets for those things done or not done, said or not said, imagined but not realized. Even though an average life has over 2.2 billion seconds to live; life span is short, for we truly are here today and gone tomorrow. For the 86,400 seconds of each day, people strive to make the very best decisions so that they might increase their chances of improving their present and future circumstances. While the ultimate goal of a Christian is to live a life

so pleasing to God that upon death one

hears those sweet words “good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21), our sin craved minds keep our decisions focused on receiving earthly rather than heavenly treasures. While the depravity of our minds might seem to have no limitations there always comes a time when one’s conscience forces one to bow to a time of reflection. Since we as Christians will be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ for our decisions (2 Corinthians 5:10); reflection and course directions should not just be done only when faced with tribulations or physical death, but moment by moment.

In Philippians 3:7-14 Paul looks back at his life and concludes two important facts when it comes to reflection. First, a successful life lived is one that focuses on pleasing God, not ourselves. Even if one regrets their decisions and efforts have not led to obtaining the worldly markers of success such as fame, power, money or good looks; one can still feel like a success for what this world has to offer is garbage in comparison to knowing our Lord! Paul’s second point is that righteousness is not obtained through one’s effort but through faith in Jesus Christ. For all of us who regret sinning so frequently there is a cure for the guilt and shame we feel – repentance and forgiveness! We need not live as the depraved and mortally wounded but as confessing, redeemed children of God!

## Dealing with Regret #1: Failure to Become Famous, Rich or Powerful



Every person wants to feel like their life matters. It is human nature to strive to become “all that one can be.” Success or failure is often determined by comparing ourselves to the most “successful” people that we know. Based on worldly standards the “success” that is assigned to one’s life depends on how much money, fame or power one has in comparison to the money, fame and power of the people that we know. After all, don’t the richest, most famous people of this world have access to the

greatest sources of pleasure? The one hundred

foot yautes, tropical vacations, servants, fast cars, and endless vacations certainly do sound enticing! This world tells us the better one’s decisions and the greater one’s effort to obtain success, the greater one’s chances of moving further up this temporal pleasure chain to become truly “successful” at life.

Day in and day out the world reminds us that those who are average or below average in terms of acquiring wealth, fame and power are believed to have failed to grasp the ever existing opportunities of this very rich country! Who has not heard the statement that North America is the land of opportunity. The world tells us that the poorest in this country can become the richest! The problem with this philosophy is that better decisions and greater effort does not always equate to success. Matthew 5:45 states God causes the sun to raise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. In Ecclesiastes 9:11 Solomon states that often the “race is not won by the swift, or the battle to the strong, or wealth to the brilliant, or favour to the learned; but time and chance happens to them all.” Better decisions and greater effort only leads to worldly success when circumstances allow opportunities come to fruition. When life circumstances turn for the worse often no level of effort or skill can reverse the tides of misfortune! Those who go through some of the most debilitating tribulations of life often do not perceive their lives as valuable because they were unable to acquire wealth, fame and power.

Left with the world’s definition of success then value is partially determined by effort and skill but mostly based on winning the lottery of chance. As a Christian I choose not to join this world on its sea of meaninglessness, but choose to embrace a better and proper definition of the value of a life as given by Paul to the church of Philippi.

**But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.  
8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth  
of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I  
consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ (Ephesians 3:7-8)**

Looking back Paul's human nature must have wondered how much he lost for the sake of being an ambassador of Christ. Would he have become a famous Rabbi? Would he have continued to gain public support and be honored by the people like his mentor Gamaliel? To what extent could he have furthered his power base if only he had continued to cultivate his relationships with both the Jewish and Roman authorities? Being a man of such prominence would he not have become rich beyond his wildest imagination? Would he have been one of those rich people with a fancy house, many servants and still able to give gifts to the temple treasury that would make others envious? On his past course that he was heading the answer seems reasonable to say YES!



When Paul was called by Jesus Christ and told "I will show him how much you must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15), did he realize how much he was about to give up? He probably would have known at that time he was about to give up his career (Galatians 1:14-16) and connections (Acts 4:1-2) but did he know he was about to trade the money, fame and power for persecutions? After all, for becoming an ambassador of Christ Paul was put into prison, received floggings, was exposed to the elements, received the 40 lashes minus one

(five times), was beaten with rods (three times) and stones (once), was shipwrecked (three times), and was constantly in danger of bandits, his fellow Jewish citizens and the Gentile authorities (2 Cor. 11:21-33).

While sitting in a jail cell facing imminent death I wonder if Paul even for a moment reflected on the injustice of it all! After all, Asaph in his moment of reflection questioned whether God was just in the ways that He deals with His creation. Like Paul, Asaph knew what it was like to go through some very hard times. In Psalms 73 he states "all day long I have been afflicted and every morning brings new punishments (verse 14)." To make matters worse Asaph looks upon the lands only to find that those with arrogant, callous, evil imaginations without limit have received no human burdens as they continually drink in the waters of abundance! When Paul said "but whatever gains to me" he certainly was reflecting on what might have been.



Our human nature is one that often regrets decisions made in the past. When faced with trials and tribulations or the possibility of death we often take time to reflect and take stock as to how well we have “succeeded” or “failed” in life. With the skyscrapers of those with more money, fame and power all around us we often feel like our “success” was within our grasp but our bad decisions meant others would feast while we famine. Even though we are no where near as poor as this young girl, not meeting our North American, insatiable desire to have it “ALL”

makes us feel like we are living a shanty town of our own failure and inadequacies.

Is this how Paul or Asaph felt about their lives? While they were certainly justified in thinking they were living in Shanty towns, their conclusions about how to evaluate success and failure were starkly different than that of this world. Paul states in Phil. 3:8 that whatever gains he had or could have had were a loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus his Lord! Paul then says money, fame and power are garbage in his sight! I have today Paul and Asaph’s shopping mall. How much would you give for a single sneaker with holes in the soles, stinking like a legume and without a matching pair? How much would you pay for a pair of Nike sneakers new off the shelf? How much would you give me for last month’s moldy, maggot infested roast beef dinner? How much would you give me for this freshly cooked lobster dinner? In other words, what would you give to receive the material wealth of this world? For Paul the answer was nothing! The things of this world are here today and gone tomorrow, their beauty and splendor always bow to the passage of time to become mere dust and figments of our imaginations! Money, fame and power all end up in the same pile of garbage to dissolve into the nothingness in which they came!



After Paul gives his standard greeting to the church of Ephesus, he opens his letter with a statement that clearly identifies God’s definition of success. True success in life does not come from acquiring money, fame or power but in one’s relationship with the Lord! Unlike the world’s definition in which success is based on effort, skillset and chance; success in God’s kingdom is based on surrender to receive the spiritual blessings already offered to every Christian. Those who were at one time dead in their transgressions and sins, who

chased after those things that satisfied the cravings of their flesh (Ephesians 2:1-5), have been offered salvation through grace and faith to receive more spiritual blessings than they could

ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20)! This does not mean that effort does not play a significant role in living a holy life (Romans 6:1). For Paul the key to success is to surrender one's right to make decisions (1 Corinthians 10:23-31) by seeking, knowing and obeying God's will so that one might be made "mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Going back to Asaph in Psalms 73, what did he conclude in relation to living a "successful" life? While he entertained the possibility that it was vanity to follow God, once he took a closer at the destiny of both, evil doers and God fearing people, hell or heaven; Asaph came to a completely different conclusion. He looked at the past present and future and concluded that his reward for living a good and holy life was to know God and have a relationship with Him forever. Both Paul and Asaph rightly concluded that even if one has not obtained the worldly markers of success such as fame, power, money or good looks; one can still feel like a success for what this world has to offer is garbage in comparison to the spiritual blessings that comes from knowing our Lord!

#### **Dealing with Regret #2: Failure to Live a Righteous Life**

**I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:8b-9)**

After having redefined successful living by stating one is to seek the spiritual blessings that comes from knowing Christ rather than money, fame or power; Paul's states his second point of reflection: righteousness is not obtained through one's own effort but through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture states we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Even though Christians have been told to no longer serve the god of self and chase temporal pleasures (1 Peter 4:3), we often make sinful, heinous decisions that would make even the evillest of Sodom and Gomorrah blush and condemn our actions. Looking back Paul could not help but remember his atrocities. He could and would not forget he was the one who got letters from the high priest to imprison those who declared Jesus Christ the Messiah (Acts 9:1-2). He could and would not forget he was the one who was present and approved of the stoning of the Stephen (Acts 8:1), a man full of God's grace and power whose face shone like the face of an angel (Acts 6:15)!





Paul, who tried to destroy the church Christ died for (Galatians 1:13) had good reason to be overwhelmed by guilt and shame! After all, what could he ever do to make it right with those he imprisoned or had executed? Is not the past already spent and therefore unalterable? While the past cannot be changed, Paul soon learned that there is a cure for the guilt and shame of having sinned: confession and repentance! 1 John 1:9 states “if we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Even though Paul was

blameless as a Pharisee he was not right in God’s sight by following the law for if he was then Christ died for nothing (Galatians 2:21). Paul concluded that the human condition that is too weak to obey the law (Romans 8:3), because it is hostile and rebellious to God (Romans 8:7) can only be made right in God’s sight through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! While Paul knew he would never be sinless he had great comfort in knowing that being sealed by the Holy Spirit meant he would never have stopped being part of God’s family (Ephesians 1:14)! Paul also took great comfort in knowing that his confession and repentance for persecuting the church was enough for God to erase this sin forever from his life.

Likewise, we who have sinned much can be forgiven much as well. While reflection is incredibly important because it can flesh out unforgiven sins, it is not to be done to overwhelm and cripple our lives. Instead of living with the guilt and shame of heinous sins we are to take them to the cross, repent and have our past redeemed!

## Conclusion

**Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14)**

Paul concludes this passage in Philippians with some rather encouraging words! First, he admits that while he knows “success” is based on (1) realizing the spiritual blessings in Christ that he has already been given and that (2) his past has already been redeemed; he still struggles with his human nature. To be honest we all do! When reflecting we have to constantly remind ourselves that money, fame and power are not the keys to “success.” Failure is not determined by the lack of earthly things acquired nor is it determined by the heinous sins that we have done. While some of our greatest course adjustments in life come from reflection, Paul says those who have been forgiven much are not to live in the present shackled by guilt and shame of those things done or not done, said or not said, imagined but not realized. As Christians we are to learn from our past mistakes only to the extent that it redeems the

present and get our eyes focused on what truly matters: winning the prize of eternal life with Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour!