

# ***What Should I Do About My Regrets? – Dan Hitz***

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***Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. – Romans 7:24-8:2 NIV***



Many people say, “Live life with no regrets”. To a large degree I agree with this sentiment. We should live our lives for Christ and our behaviors and attitudes should be clear evidence of the transformational power of Jesus Christ working in our lives. However, if we’re honest with ourselves, none of us have lived our entire lives as a reflection of God’s glory. We’ve all made mistakes. We all have regrets.

We’ve all carved deep ruts in our lives. As Christians, the good news is that some of those ruts are more like virtues than ruts. The moment we come to Christ, we should start establishing deep, godly habits and patterns of true Christlikeness. Essentially, good ruts... lifestyles... virtues... Unfortunately, we also have ruts that have derailed us and have become deeply entrenched negative habits and patterns. By the time we get sick of some negative ruts, we may have lived far more years of our lives than we have left. We may or may not have time to undo all of the consequences of the negative ruts while we’re still here on earth. Even if we do, it’s going to take us a lot of years and a lot of hard work to get out of the ruts. The consequences may linger.

I was at the bedside of a close family member a while ago as she passed into eternity. She knew Jesus. She had some beautiful virtues beyond that which I can ever hope to possess. She had a very difficult life. She was very faithful in some of the huge trials that came her way. She also had many huge, challenging ruts. Some through no fault of her own. Others were built slowly through years by making poor decisions. They were deep. They were pretty evident. They made parts of her life extremely difficult. Through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ she is now resting in His arms, fully loved and fully forgiven. Her decades old ruts are now a thing of the past. She is now fully transformed.

Thinking about her life caused me to focus on some of my own ruts that I’ve been wrestling with for years. Today I’m still dealing with some of the negative patterns that were present all the way back to my childhood, and some that formed in my adolescence and early adulthood. When I gave my life to Jesus, He filled in some of those ruts supernaturally. Others, He allowed to remain. Some of the ones He left I tried to avoid. Others, I kept reinforcing even though I knew I shouldn’t. Years later, as the conviction and consequences became clearer, I began to repent and work to overcome those ruts. I’m not sure I have enough years left to fully overcome some of them this side of eternity.

*These are the nations that the Lord left in the land to test those Israelites who had not experienced the wars of Canaan. He did this to teach warfare to generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle. – Judges 3:1-2 NLT*

The consequences of ruts don’t usually go away overnight. Jesus takes some of the earthly consequences away, but He leaves just enough that I have to continue working to overcome the ruts.

I don't see Him leaving ruts and their effects as punishment. I see them as a wise and loving Savior teaching me things I refused to learn early on. I see Him empowering me to endure and walk through the natural consequences of my ruts, as he teaches me to lean on Him for wisdom and equipping. He leads us through the process of replacing the ruts with godly virtues. In this process, we grow deeper in relationship with our Heavenly Father, and the family of God that He sends to help us in our journey.

This gets us back to the thought of regrets. Even though I do believe that we should live our lives with no regrets. I also agree with something I heard on TV a few years ago. I forget exactly who said it, but when I heard the statement, "If you don't have any regrets you haven't learned anything", something clicked in my heart. Yes. We should live our lives so that we don't have any regrets, but none of us are perfect. We will make mistakes. That is what the cross is all about. It is during those times of true conviction, sometimes even realizing the consequences of our actions, that repentance happens and change occurs. We may regret the consequences of our actions and realize the cost of our poor decisions. That brings regret. Jesus is the one who can meet us in our regrets, cleanse us of our sin, and empower us to live differently.



Regrets can also inspire us to make amends; to apologize and try to correct our mistakes and heal the relationships with those we've hurt. As we think about reconciling our relationships, we need to proceed prayerfully, own our part of the situation, and allow the Lord to work in the hearts of those we apologize to. Sometimes the people we've offended aren't in an emotional place for us to approach them. In cases like this, we need to prayerfully repent to the Lord and trust Him to work in their hearts in His timing.

*But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. – 1 John 1:7-9 NLT*

The statement, "If you don't have any regrets you haven't learned anything," touched my heart in another way. I used to struggle intensely with condemnation. I knew cognitively that Jesus cleansed me of my sin and forgave me, yet I was struggling to forgive myself. That statement refocused my thoughts on the truth that regrets mean that we realized what we did was wrong and wish we would have done something different. Going forward, we can learn how to be different... how to be better. Instead of focusing on the failure and condemnation, we need to focus on the fact that we've been redeemed and are being transformed. The Holy Spirit is teaching us how to live life differently. Regrets and condemnation aren't a virtue. They are a sign that we need to acknowledge our ruts, turn to Christ, and ask Him to change our hearts.

In times of temptation, the fallout that remains from our ruts can be learning tools and reminders that what we've done in the past didn't work. That can help us avoid giving into temptation. In the areas where we're still experiencing the consequences of our ruts, we can ask the Lord for the grace to deal with our thorn in the flesh... even if we're the ones who willingly stepped on the thorn. He is gracious. He will give us the strength to live each day for Him. He will give us the grace to overcome our ruts and regrets and turn them into virtues.

*And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. – Philippians 1:6 NLT*