

Regret, Remorse, Repentance  
Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12  
Preached March 23, 2025

Good morning, everyone, here in the pews and on Zoom. I am Liz Miller Grasty and it is my pleasure to share with you today some thoughts on what can keep us from experiencing a full and satisfying life. I was going to say “both our personal and religious lives” but it hit me, these should not be two separate items but one life we live within the power and love of Jesus Christ. So let me share three experiences: regrets, remorse and repentance.

What do I mean by REGRET? The dictionary and Wikipedia give these thoughts. To feel sad, disappointed over something that has happened or been done. Especially a loss or missed opportunity. A mistake you made. Wishing you had made a different decision in the past because the consequences of the decision you did make were unfavorable. The self-recrimination which comes with regret is thought to spur corrective action. Maybe yes, maybe no. A regret might be followed by merely “Oh well, too bad” and nothing changes.

Let me share a regret like that. I recently was watching Reels on Facebook. You who follow Facebook know these start with short videos of some interest drawn from what you have watched before. This one was on weight loss guaranteeing fast permanent weight loss simply by chewing a tasty gumdrop or two or three- which would treat inflamed fat cells (the cause of our weight gain beyond our control) and make them disappear. No change in diet or exercise required. This was exactly what I had been hoping for. The before and after pictures and doctors' endorsements continued for over half an hour. Despite my sister's saying “Don't buy that” or maybe because of it, I entered my information and PayPal sent the money. Immediately I felt buyer's remorse but still was hopeful. Do I regret this? You bet I do.

Another type of regret is that of a perceived or real missed opportunity. You may be familiar with a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier titled Maude Muller. This is one of my favorites. The last paragraph includes these words:

Alas for maiden, alas for Judge, for rich repiner and household drudge! God pity them both!  
And pity us all, who vainly the dreams of youth recall; for of all sad words of tongue or pen  
the saddest are these: **It might have been.**

**What might have been** and **if only** ... we had known the outcome, if we had been quicker, richer, smarter, more thoughtful, more loving. Hindsight can cause us to beat ourselves up.

REMORSE - What is this? An emotional response to our own wrongdoing or something left undone. Feelings of regret, guilt and sorrow are often accompanied by a desire to make amends or seek forgiveness but does not necessarily lead to a change in behavior. And you wish for another outcome. You may be thinking of something you are remorseful about in your own life. These are painfully private, and we can only hope and pray that we have learned something from this experience. An example you are familiar with is Judas. After betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver he experienced deep remorse and tried to return the money and stop the arrest. (Matt 27: 3-4) Despite his remorse, Judas's actions did not lead to repentance or reconciliation with God. Ultimately this resulted in his tragic end. I have read in a bible study class that Judas' betrayal

was needed as a catalyst to set the crucifixion and resurrection in motion. Interesting idea. And a topic for another sermon.

REPENTANCE adds the resolve to change. This is from the action verb Repent. To want to make a permanent change. Repentance is a central theme in both the Old and New Testaments. In Paul's letter to the Philippians Ch 3: 12-14. (I paraphrase a bit) He tells us "Not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Jesus Christ took hold of me...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." In the Old Testament in Psalm 51:10 King David's response to his sin with Bathsheba is a powerful example of repentance. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." David's repentance was marked by a sincere plea for God's mercy and a commitment to change demonstrating the transformative power of true repentance.

I believe it is important in considering someone's repentance – is it sincere? -but we are not to judge. We cannot judge. This is between that person and God. We have our own issues to wrestle with and this will take all our concentration and prayer.

Apostle Paul also emphasizes repentance in his letters, urging believers that they should turn away from their sinful ways and live in accordance with the Spirit. In Acts 20: v 20 he is speaking to both Jews and Gentiles "I preached that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds worthy of their repentance." Deeds of repentance demonstrate a sincere and real change.

The Bible calls believers –us- to move beyond mere remorse and embrace true repentance, leading to a restored relationship with God and a to live a life that reflects this change. That is heavy scripture. Now let me finalize by telling you a true story which some of you may already have heard.

John Newton was born in England in 1725 and died in 1807. He was an English slave trader who became an Anglican minister, a hymn writer and later a noted abolitionist. He is best known for Amazing Grace which we will sing as our closing hymn. His repentance caused his transformation from a faithless slave trader to a man of deep faith.

A short biography: His mother died when he was 7 and by 11 he accompanied his father on sea voyages. At 18 he was pressed into service with the Royal Navy. After attempting to desert, he was whipped and set aboard a passing slave vessel. There he was attracted to the Transatlantic slave trade as "an easy and credible way of life" for a navigator and later captain, certainly not for the cargo, the slaves. He had a near-death experience during a violent storm and prayed for his life and the safety of his ship. He felt this was his conversion. He saw no conflict between his growing faith and his employment. He continued to work as a slave trader and captained 3 voyages between 1750 and 1754. Poor health induced him to find a new profession. He turned to the religious life becoming an ordained Church of England clergyman in 1764. As his faith matured Newton's remorse over his involvement in the slave trade surfaced and galvanized him. In 1785 he met William Wilburforce a politician and convinced him to stay in politics rather than pursue the religious life. Wilburforce was a prominent abolitionist and together they founded the Anti-Slavery Society. Newton lived to witness the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. In 1833 the Slavery Abolition Act was passed to free all slaves in the British Empire. England purchased all these enslaved people for 20 million pounds as restitution to their owners who were mostly

rich plantation owners living in England. Slaves were freed including those in the Caribbean sugar islands.

In closing Regret, Remorse and Repentance are shown in stages throughout John Newton's life in ways we can relate to because of their dramatic consequences. I offer you the contemporary and Biblical examples for our study and understanding. When you feel uncomfortable with a situation you have caused, take a moment to consider Do I regret this? Do I feel Remorse or am I truly Repentant and promise to myself and anyone I have hurt, that I will turn my life around. We are not perfect and never will be. We may – even probably- backslide from our resolve. But with repentance, we will try and try again until the change we know we need finally takes hold. Think of the disciple Peter who denied Christ three times the night before his crucifixion. Yet Peter repented and became the Apostle who is called the Rock of the Christian church. Strong and steadfast.

There is hope for us all.

Amen

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