

Starting Over – Recognizing Your Regrets

January 14, 2018

Title: “Was that Wrong?”

Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-9

“I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.” – These are the words that the patriot Nathan Hale reportedly said just prior to being hung by the British as a spy on September 22, 1776. While the exact specific words may never be known, historians are pretty clear that Hale did indeed make this statement. It’s rather remarkable. His love of his newly formed country, his belief in their cause and the bravery of this American is commendable and has made Hale a hero throughout our history. But more amazing to me is his statement that this was his only regret. Heck, I come up with more regrets each day before I finish my morning coffee. I regret staying up too late, hitting the snooze button a second time. And I regret on a cold rainy Friday, that I am heading to bible study and that it’s Michelle’s day to walk Sheldon. Ok. To be honest, I only regret thinking how happy I am about that.

We all have things we wish we hadn’t, or had, done. Things that we wish we had said, or could unsay. We all have regrets. I think back to my early school days. From my earliest school memories through high school I always seemed to get by, with decent grades, by doing “just enough.” I’d get my B’s and high C’s, and then when I would be motivated I would work a little harder to try for an A, or at least guarantee a B. But then, when I started college, I found out that “just enough” wasn’t quite enough. By never building study habits, and trying to enjoy myself a little too much, my semester grades reflected that. My grade point average dropped, and dropped, until I found myself on academic probation. Rising to the challenge I threw myself into the next semester, in particular my toughest class – Physics. I stopped skipping classes; did all of my

assignments; joined a study group and worked my tail off. The day before the midterm exam I decided to pass on the general review class and went to the library with a couple of classmates for some final studying on specific areas we were struggling with. The next evening, as I prepared to leave for the exam it suddenly hit me. The exam would not be in our regular classroom, but in a separate hall – the location of which was disclosed at the review class that I did not go to. I called a couple of my classmate’s apartments, but each of their roommates said they had already left for the exam, and no – they didn’t know where it was. There were no cellphones then and no internet to look up the information. I rushed up to the campus and spent an hour looking for the exam room – but Penn State is a pretty big campus and I soon realized it was futile. The midterm exam made up 40% of our final grade. If I was absolutely perfect with my classwork and received a 100% on my final, I would be able to eke out a D grade and pass the class. Knowing this, the next day I marched onto campus and went to the admissions office to formally drop out of college.

As I was considering this, and many additional, regrets, I realized something. Most of those regrets revolved around how I was affected by my actions, or inactions. Why was it that I have so few regrets about what I have caused in others? I guess I’m just one heck-of-a-guy. Or maybe there is another explanation. A follow up on my Penn State regret might help to highlight that. After dropping out of school I went home and I joined the work force and began to work in a warehouse. I was ok with that for a while but after a couple of years of that, I decided that I wanted to go back to school, and this time I changed my attitude. I went to all of my classes; sat up front; asked questions; did the work and studied hard. I spent a few years working and going to night school until I received my Associates degree. Then I quit my job and went full time to earn a bachelor’s degree. My hard work paid off and I not only graduated, but earned a couple of

awards that I received at the school's annual awards night before graduation. My wife, Michelle, joined me at the banquet and it was fun – and quite an honor. Sometime after that Michelle and I were talking and she asked me if I had invited my parents to join us that night. Sheepishly I admitted that I hadn't. And even worse, that it hadn't even crossed my mind even though, knowing my parents, they would have been proud to have been there. But I was thinking like a husband, rather than a son. This was an action, or more properly stated - an inaction, that I didn't recognize as "a regret" until it was pointed out to me. It makes me wonder how many other regrets I avoid by simply not considering them; especially when they don't appear that important to us at face value. And yet sometimes they are very important, and in some cases rather severe. Take King David.

One evening while walking on the roof of his palace, David observes a woman bathing outside on another building. David is intrigued by her beauty and asks about her. He is told that she is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David's 30 great warriors. Uriah is currently away, in battle in the service of his King. Knowing this, David sends for her and takes her to his bed. When he later finds out that she is with child, he attempts to cover it up. He sends for her husband who is still off in battle, hoping that while he is in the city he will spend time with Bathsheba and thus make it reasonable that the child she has conceived is his.

But Uriah is more honorable than David. Knowing that his comrades are still on the battlefield, Uriah feels that to spend time in the comfort and love of his wife's arms would not be appropriate. He instead sleeps at the entrance to the palace with the rest of his master's servants. Knowing that he cannot tempt Uriah, David sends word to his Commander Joab, that Uriah should be sent to a place where the fighting is fierce and then withdraw his forces, leaving Uriah to die. He is successful at this and after a proper time of mourning, Bathsheba moves in with

David, becomes his wife and has his child. David probably feels that the people will look at him with admiration. He has taken in the wife of his servant, who died fighting for him, and is giving her and the child a home to enjoy.

God is not so happy with David. The Lord sent his servant, the prophet Nathan, to explain it to him. But Nathan, either through his own experiences with David, or because God warned him, probably assumed David would either deny or get angry, does not confront him. Instead Nathan tells him a parable.

2 Samuel 12:1-9

Nathan Rebukes David

12 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle,³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

As I read this, I was somehow reminded of a Seinfeld episode where Jerry’s friend, George Costanza, has a similar type relationship at his office. George is confronted by his boss about the inappropriateness of his actions and George’s response is classic:

Seinfeld Video

I don’t think David’s reaction was quite as...dishonest as George’s, but he definitely presents a remarkable lack of accountability and understanding of the mistakes he has made. And it’s not a question of knowing right from wrong. He gets that – at least in somebody else. After Nathan tells the parable, what is David response?

⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

He sees that the behavior is wrong. He just doesn’t connect it with his own. He also knows that what he did was wrong in a couple of ways. 1. David knows scripture so he must know that he has broken 2 of the 10 commandments here – thou shalt not commit adultery, and thou shalt not commit murder. 2. We can also tell David knew right from wrong because he is trying to cover up his indiscretions as he goes on. Unfortunately those cover ups just add to his mistakes.

Let's look at some of the bad decisions David makes.

- He sees Bathsheba bathing on the roof. Should he:
 - Avert his eyes
 - Send servants to find out who she is
- Once he finds out she is the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, should he:
 - Send her a message suggesting that her bathing habits are in public view
 - Ask her to come up to his place
- When Bathsheba tells David she is pregnant, he should
 - Confess to Uriah and ask his forgiveness
 - Try to trick Uriah into believing the child is his
- When Uriah refuses to stay with his wife, David should
 - Confess to Uriah and ask his forgiveness
 - Conspire to have Uriah killed

I am hoping that you all answered A to each of the questions, or at least most of them. Anybody that got more than one wrong can come see me after the service for prayer. David didn't do so well. In the words of Dean Wormer – "0.0". David's decisions get worse and worse as he goes along. Bad decisions, crimes, sin – It all starts as something so simple – appreciating a beautiful woman, or a handsome man. Follow that with a little harmless flirting. And then, if you're not careful an affair and the murder of a friend. Or more common, it will result in the ruin of a marriage or relationship. The simple bad choices that we make can steamroll and become something we can't control. Greg's story is another example.

Starting Over Video

In my work with CLPRM, the Recovery Service and the Recovery Café, I have talked with a number of people over the years that have similar stories and are going through recovery for drug or alcohol abuse. Not one of those conversations started with the person saying that this was exactly where they wanted to be when they had that first drink, or the first joint. No. It's always, "It looked like fun – other people do it – I'm strong enough to stop if I have to." That's a big one. "I'm strong enough to stop if I have to." And now those decisions are followed by a lifetime of regret. Last year Michelle and I went to some recovery houses to share about losing Jimmy to an overdose in 2016. During discussion time after we spoke it was powerful listening to men and women saying they never thought of much of how much their loved ones were hurt by their actions. And rarely, if ever, considered the hurt that follows an overdose. Not that they didn't care; just that they didn't think about it. They didn't recognize that regret.

Last week we heard about loving our regrets. Not that we should like or enjoy the things we did or didn't do that causes us regret. Rather, taking those regrets, making them yours and learning from them. We can't change the past, but we can learn from it. This week we are talking about recognizing our regrets.

Being introspective - watching what we do and how it affects us, and others

Having people to hold you accountable – friends, spouses. Other people can often see how what we do impacts others better than we can because they are removed, even if just slightly. Nathan showing David. Michelle recognizing that my parents would have appreciated being at the banquet. Maybe I would have eventually realized it. But she showed it to me before I did.

Your relationship with God – Reading the bible. Praying to God regularly – speaking and listening. The more you do this the better that you understand what God would prefer you to do.

For one thing it can help us to avoid those causes of regret to begin with. Secondly, through conversations with God we may pick up on regrets we weren't aware of.

Psalm 139:23-24

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

²⁴ And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Why is important to recognize your regrets? Remember: Your regrets are not the things that you did that you wish you didn't do. It's the negative feeling you have for doing those things.

Avoid – Learn to avoid doing the things that cause you regret.

Limit – When you are able to recognize your regrets, sometimes you can limit the amount of additional pain that can come from your actions.

Fix – Sometimes we can actually fix our problems and even eliminate the regret.

Back when I was working in that warehouse I mentioned a little while ago, I struck up a friendship with a young lady that worked in the office. We each dated some mutual friends and sometimes ended up at the same events. One time, when we both weren't dating, she came out to the warehouse to ask a couple of questions. And after she finished with the business questions she surprised me by asking me if we could go out together some time. I gave her that perfect answer that every woman in that situation wants to hear – "I'll think about it." She quickly broke off the conversation and went back into the office. I regretted my response almost instantly and, I think within the hour, definitely by the end of the day, I apologized to her and told her that I'd love to go out some time. Fortunately for me, the offer was still on the table. You see, when we recognize our regrets we sometimes have the chance to correct the things that caused them. In

this case that comment is not even something I regret any more, because she and I are going to celebrate our 31st anniversary in a couple of months and I think she actually likes telling that story more than I do.

Recognize your regrets and try to fix the circumstance that led to the regret. And if you can't do that, at least learn to make it your own, learn from it and live with it.

There is another kind of regret that I recently recognized. I regret not knowing Tom Harsha as well as I wish I did. I was blessed to be able to go on mission trips with him, be in bible studies together and just get to know him at services. But the faith he showed during his battle was inspiring to me. I know that it is hard to try and know everybody we meet in a deep way. But if we spend just a little more time with all of those that we meet, we might be able to regret a little less.

Let's pray.