

## “You Can Have A Do-Over”

Luke 15:11-20a

Series: *Finding Your Way Back to God Week 2. Awakening to Regret*

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April 10, 2016

What is life all about? In the movie City Slickers Mitch, played by Billy Crystal, is struggling with that very question. Racing headlong into a mid-life crisis, Mitch shares what he does for a living during a Dad’s Day at his son’s third grade class. He’s depressed that his life is going nowhere. So instead of talking about his work as a salesman, Mitch warns the kids about what’s ahead. He says:

Value this time in your life, kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices, and it goes by so quickly. When you're a teenager, you think you can do anything, and you do.

Your 20s are a blur.

Your 30s, you raise your family, you make a little money, and you think to yourself, “*What happened to my 20s?*”

Your 40s, you grow a little potbelly. You grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud, and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother.

Your 50s, you have a minor surgery. You'll call it a procedure, but it's a surgery.

Your 60s, you have a major surgery; the music is still loud, but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway.

Your 70s, you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale. You start eating dinner at 2:00, lunch around 10:00, breakfast the night before. And you spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering, "How come the kids don't call?"

By your 80s, you've had a major stroke, and you end up babbling to some Jamaican nurse whom your wife can't stand but whom you call mama.

Any questions?<sup>1</sup>

I hear a lifetime of regret in those words. City Slickers is a mid-life crisis movie. It’s a tale of three guys waking up to the reality that their lives have not turned out the way they hoped. So they leave the concrete canyons of New York City to drive a herd of cattle through the sagebrush canyons of the Wild West. A longing for love, purpose and meaning drives them to leave home. What they find out among the tumblin’ tumbleweeds is regret. They regret the

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<sup>1</sup> City Slickers (Columbia Pictures, 1991), rated PG-13, written by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, directed by Ron Underwood

choices, the decisions, the mistakes they've made. That is, until Mitch meets Curly, a crusty ol' cowboy who's seen lots of guys like Mitch. Curly tells Mitch he needs to find "the one thing" that will make his life meaningful. By the end of the trail, these City Slickers discover they don't have to be driven by regret. It's like when they played ball and couldn't tell if it was in or out so they called "Do-Over!" Life can be a do-over, a second chance, a new beginning.

Anyone out there need a do-over? It could be a small one – like maybe you need to do over the drive to church this morning without the argument in the car. It could be a medium-sized one. You wish you could do over the turn you made that caused the car accident. You want to take back those words that severed that relationship. You wish you studied harder for that exam. Or it might be a large, life-changing do-over. You wish you took a different career path. You regret the mistakes you made in your marriage or how you treated your children. You wish you took better care of your health or never got started on those unhealthy behaviors. Like those City Slickers, you may feel down in a canyon of regret, wondering how you got here.

Jesus tells a powerful story about a son who is deep in regret. During our series *Finding Your Way Back to God* we are digging deeply into the Lord's most famous parable: The Prodigal Son. Why is this story of a lost son far from home so moving and memorable? In one way or another, we all stray from our heavenly Father. Whether we are near or far, we also discover we can all find our way back home to God. This story speaks to us because it is our story. As we move through the parable, we find there are five awakenings, five discoveries, five turning points on the way back to God which are common to all of us.

Last week Gloria talked about the first one: Awakening to Longing. This awakening is all about the universal longings we have for love, purpose and meaning. It's these longings that give us that restless feeling that "there's got to be more" to this life. Unfortunately, too often, we take those God-given longings and try to satisfy them apart from God. We begin to chase stuff we think will bring us fulfillment. We're after relationships, money, a stellar career, pleasure. Sometimes this chase leads us to make decisions which are not in our best interest. Inevitably, what we thought will bring fulfillment falls short. That's what this young man found out.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. (Luke 15:11-13)

Let's face it: this is not a good kid. When he demands his share of the estate, he is telling his dear old dad, "I can't wait 'til you're in your grave to get my inheritance. I wish you were dead. Give it to me now!" If your teen said that you might be tempted to pull his iPad and send him packing. But this dad doesn't. Instead, he gives his son a third of the estate. When word of this insult races through the small farm village they are so outraged they can barely speak. One disgusted neighbor is willing to buy the boy's land but he doesn't like it.

To avoid their scorn, the kid quickly gathers his stuff, gets out of town and goes off on one wild ride. Along the way he loses everything. He leaves behind his family, his village, his country, his money, his self-respect. He even loses his religion.

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (Luke 15:14-16)

Jews don't eat pigs and they certainly don't eat with pigs. Jesus could not paint a dirtier, depressing, down and out scene. On his hands and knees, up to his elbows in mud and pig slop, the boy who planned to taste all the world has to offer is now sparring with swine for his supper. While he is down there with his hand in the trough, a light suddenly dawns on him.

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. (Luke 15:17-20)

Now comes the second Awakening: Regret. Notice what comes before regret: pain. This kid is so hungry he will eat pig food. And the stink! Have you ever been around pigs? Stench, slop and starvation. Often, that's what it takes to wake us up. That's not God's will for us. Yet for some reason we just don't get it until we feel the pain. Until then, we don't smell the stink of what we are doing even though everyone around us does. Until then, we don't realize what we are doing won't satisfy our starvation. It's what the 12 step people call "Hitting bottom." Until we are sick and tired of being sick and tired, until we can no longer stand the pain, we don't feel the regret, we don't come to our senses, we won't turn around.

Coming to your senses and admitting you have a problem is the first step towards a new life. Author Richard Rohr writes this:

You cannot heal what you do not acknowledge, and what you do not consciously acknowledge will remain in control of you from within, festering and destroying you and those around you.

The son in Jesus' story acknowledges he is going the wrong way and then makes a crucial second step: he turns around and goes home. The Bible has a word for turning around: repentance. In our day, repentance has a bad reputation. When we hear that word we usually think of street corner preachers shouting: "Repent you sinner or you will burn!" Repentance has been used as a scare tactic. Let me tell you what it really means. "Repentance" is the translation of two words: In the Old Testament it's the Hebrew word תשובה *teshuvah* which means "to return." In the New Testament it's the Greek word μετάνοια *metanoia* which means "to change one's mind." So repentance means to change your thinking, to come to your senses, to wake up and realize you are going the wrong way, and to return home.

I just returned Friday from a course in California. When I got off the plane in LA last Sunday, I started walking quickly to get to my shuttle. I kept looking for signs for "Ground Transportation." When I didn't see them I walked even faster until I realized I was moving very quickly in the wrong direction...and turned around. In Jesus story, the son finally regrets his decisions, comes to his senses and decides to return to his father.

Now don't miss a subtle yet essential point in the parable. The boy may be regretful but he is not remorseful. He does not say, "Oh how I've wasted my life. Why did I hurt my father? How could I have been such a fool?" There is one drive which motivates him: hunger. He knows he can never get back in the family. He burned that bridge when he wished his father was dead. Yet with a carefully crafted speech that says all the right things, he might be able to get a job. It will be humiliating to work on the estate he once partly owned, but that's better than slumming with the swine.

The point is: when we awaken to regret and return to God, we don't always do it with pure motives or deep remorse. Sometimes we do it to save our skin. Sometimes we are simply scared of hell. This is called "Taking out fire insurance." Sometimes we are dragged back to God by a family member. Here's the point: it doesn't matter! The *depth* of your regret doesn't matter. What matters is the *direction*.

So what's keeping you from finding your way back to God? Maybe you've come to your senses. Maybe you regret some of your decisions - financial decisions, relational ones, decisions that felt good in the moment even though you knew they were wrong. You've reached the first part: regret but you still need to do the second part: return home. What blocks you from having a do-over? Usually shame, guilt, and fear stand in your way. Will God accept me? Will God take me in? Can God ever forgive someone like me? Perhaps you feel like the lost son. For just a moment put yourself in his place. He turns off on the road that leads to his village. He is homeless, penniless, shoeless. He hasn't bathed in days and his cologne is eau de pig sty. His ripped clothes are covered in mud and slop. The people in the village can probably smell him before they see him. And no one is happy to see him. He shamed his family and village. He fears they are all ready to give him the kind of welcome he deserves.

Maybe, like that son, you feel afraid. That fear has you stuck in a never-ending "Sorry Cycle" of longing and regret, longing and regret. Truth is: some of us have been stuck in this "Sorry Cycle" for years. But hear me on this: All that can change today! You can have a Do-Over! Focus on the love of your Father. We'll find out more about that next week. For now my prayer is that you will turn regret into return and begin the journey of finding your way back to God. It doesn't mean you have it all figured out. It doesn't mean you won't wander in the future. It does mean you're coming home and home is where you want to stay.

Last week we introduced you to Pascal's wager. It's a bet we're challenging everyone to place with God...a bet that He's real and He loves you. Today we want to challenge every single person in the room to pray this prayer:

God, if you are real, make yourself real to me. Awaken in me the possibility that with you I could start over again.

You don't have to live in the "Sorry Cycle" cycle of longing and regret anymore. You can have a Do-Over. Let regret awaken you to return home. The story of the Prodigal Son is your story, it's my story, it's our story. I want to close today by reading you a retelling of the story by author Philip Yancey. In this version God himself is whispering, "Come home." Today can be the day you come to your senses. Today can be the day you decide to return. Come home.

Her name was Christa, and she grew up on a small cherry farm in Traverse City, Michigan. She was a wild child who dismissed her parents as old-fashioned because of how they responded to her piercings and tattoos. One night Christa and her parents had a huge fight. At the end of it, she slammed the door and said, "I hate you," then acted on a plan she had been rehearsing for months in her mind. She ran away to the big city of Detroit.

Within a few hours of arriving in Detroit, she met a man who seemed warm and nice. He drove the most expensive car she'd ever seen, and he was willing to take her in. This nice man taught her a few things that would make her valuable on the streets, and because Christa was young, she brought in top dollar for her services. As time went on, and as she got a little older, she wasn't bringing in top dollar anymore, and so she was thrown out on the street, with no money and a drug habit to support.

*And the blood will dry  
underneath my nails  
and the wind will rise up  
to fill my sails  
so you can doubt  
and you can hate  
but I know, no matter what it takes*

*I'm coming home  
I'm coming home  
tell the world I'm coming home  
let the rain wash away  
all the pain of yesterday  
I know my kingdom awaits  
and they've forgiven my mistakes  
I'm coming home  
I'm coming home  
tell the world I'm coming...*

One night she thought back to those sunny spring days when she would be lying beneath the cherry trees. Realizing that renting her body on the streets of Detroit was no way to live, she decided she would head north, maybe move to Canada and start over. On her way north, she figured, she'd try something that she thought had no chance of actually working. She mustered up enough courage to give her parents a call. No one answered, but she left a message telling them she was going to be passing through Traverse City on her way to Canada. If they wanted to see her, she would be at the bus station around midnight. After hanging up, she thought leaving the message was a stupid thing to do because odds were they were happier now that she was gone.

As the bus headed north, she could see the signs saying the bus was getting closer to Traverse City. She ran through the possible scenarios in her mind: nobody there to meet her; someone there, but only to shame her and condemn her. Finally the bus arrived in

Traverse City, and she heard the bus driver say, "Fifteen minutes at this stop, fifteen minutes."

*Still far away  
from where I belong  
but it's always darkest  
before the dawn  
so you can doubt  
and you can hate  
but I know, no matter what it takes*

*I'm coming home  
I'm coming home  
tell the world I'm coming home  
let the rain wash away  
all the pain of yesterday  
I know my kingdom awaits  
and they've forgiven my mistakes  
I'm coming home  
I'm coming home  
tell the world I'm coming...*

All her mental rehearsing didn't prepare her for what she found when she stepped off the bus. At midnight in this small-town bus depot, she walked and found dozens of familiar faces belonging to aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, all wearing silly party hats. A huge banner hanging from the walls said, "WELCOME HOME, CHRISTA!!!" Her dad broke through the crowd and ran up to her, and as she tried to explain herself, he wrapped his arms around her, making it clear that all he really cared about was that his daughter was home.

*I'm coming home  
I'm coming home  
tell the world I'm coming home  
let the rain wash away  
all the pain of yesterday  
I know my kingdom awaits  
and they've forgiven my mistakes  
I'm coming home  
I'm coming home  
tell the world I'm coming... home*