

Fantastic Future: Letting Go of Regret

January 2, 2011

Texts: Hebrews 12:1-3

Dr. Ken Calahan tells of an interesting and a scary experience while on a family vacation sailing in the Bahamas on a rented sail boat. A storm blew up and they were struggling to make it to port. He spotted an inlet with a jetty protecting it from the twenty-foot waves, so they put in there to wait out the storm. They dropped anchor to keep them clear of the large breakers. But, after a while they noticed they were slowly drifting back out into stormy waters. The anchor had not held. So they powered back in toward shore and reset the anchor only to find it would not hold very long. Everyone was getting very tired from fighting the wind and the surf, so it was agreed that they would take watches over the anchor. Several times during the night they had to get out of bed to reset the anchor. Finally dawn came with no relief from the wind. Calahan decided to take the anchor ashore and bury it deep in the sand on the beach. His wife was piloting the boat under inboard power in toward shore to let him off the bow. When he thought it was shallow enough he jumped off holding the anchor. He failed to take into account was that what looked like water only a few feet deep turned out in those incredibly clear waters to be quite deep. As he was headed to the bottom holding the heavy anchor he suddenly realized that he really didn't need to hold on to it any longer. It wouldn't help for him to go down with the anchor.

As we begin a new year it is important to make the best start we can to have the greatest possibility of a "Fantastic Future." Many of us make resolutions for the New Year to make changes in our lives to be more healthy and happy. They can be helpful; in fact the 40% to 45% who do make resolutions are ten times more likely to attain their personal goals than those who do not make resolutions. Proactivechange.com did research that says 75% of persons who make resolutions keep them at least a week, and 46% are successful in keeping them at least six months. What will you resolve to change? Here are the top three resolution items:

1. Lose weight
2. Start a exercise program
3. Stop smoking

Our New Year resolutions often fall by the wayside if we don't plan to succeed at keeping them. The most important way to start is with a positive attitude that you can succeed. And, I don't mean, "I am positive I can't keep this resolution." On Proactivechange.com you can download a free booklet by Serge Prenzel on how to make and keep your resolutions. He has some good, proven techniques to succeed in making the changes to improve your life:

1. Be positive
2. Make a commitment
3. Make a plan
4. Keep your eye on the goal

OK, with these tools in our belt, let's get to work making some positive changes in our lives. The first best first step is to stop doing what is destructive. Let me say, "**LET GO of the ANCHOR.**" It's easy to say, but knowing how is something else again. And, what we need to change may not be obvious to us. We tend to get in our habit rut and have trouble looking out of it, much less, getting out of it.

Sometimes it is helpful to ask someone else to help us figure out where we need to look. I often visit with people when they are struggling with some crisis or problem. As I am listening to them I try to pick up on clues that will help them find the root of the issue. One thing I find with church people is often they have a very powerful sense of duty and morals. Very often they feel they failed in some area of their life and they are feeling badly about themselves – feeling guilty. I have spoken about guilt that it is a very real problem. Dr. Carl Mennenger said, “**People feel guilty because they ARE GUILTY.**” A common form of guilt is REGRET.

Many people have very real reasons for their feelings of regret: a broken relationship, a lost job, a missed opportunity for growth or advancement, or simply put, bad choices, to mention just a few of the more common ones. “**If only we knew then what we know now,**” easily becomes a mantra. There are thousands of the “**If Only...’s.**”

If only I had spent more time with my spouse...

If only I had spent more time with my children...

If only I had stayed in school...

If only I had gotten my degree...

If only I had taken that job...

If only I had bought that Apple stock...

We know we made mistakes, and it is hard to get past. It’s like a sore in your mouth that you tongue keeps going back over, and over. Regret is like that anchor that Ken Calahan jumped overboard with. It was taking him down, way down. He had to stop and think, “**Why am I still holding on to this anchor?**” To say, “**Let Go of the Anchor,**” is right but not enough.

Please hear this carefully,

Regret is failing to forgive yourself for something you think you shouldn’t have done, or not done something you think you should have done =GUILT

Regret is part of life for us all, but we don’t have to keep holding on to them until we hit the bottom. Robert Jeffress, in his book ***Say Goodbye to Regret***, says regret can serve a good purpose if used properly.

Ignoring regrets can be harmful...we should think of regret as a warning light that indicates a problem... pointing us to some needed life changes.

First, remember, God know all about it. It is not secret to God, even if it is unknown to others. Secrets are very dangerous things. They have a way of wiggling out somewhere and jumping up when you least expect them. Even if you succeed in keeping them secret, they tend to spoil our relationship with the one we don’t want to know about it. How much different would it be in most cases if we just went to them and stated what happened and said, “I have hurt you; please forgive me”? By now, all would have been healed if not forgotten if we had done so at the time.

Second, God is anxious to help us get past this to a better, more happy and healthy life. That is what **forgiveness** is all about. Give up that idea that God is the mean step-father waiting for us to screw-up so he can whack us. If we learn anything about God from the Bible is it that **GOD IS LOVE! God wants to forgive us and help us to forgive ourselves.** That is the key. (We will be talking about forgiving others next week when we talk about **Resentment**.)

The Lord’s Prayer says that we ask God to forgive us our sins in the same proportion that we forgive offenses against us. Could that apply to forgiving ourselves? I believe it can when we are not trying to escape our responsibilities. Often, we are harder on ourselves than we are on others. If we don’t forgive ourselves, how can God’s forgiveness ever get to us? We block the very thing Jesus died to

do for us – “forgive us our sins.” That is a great gift of God, and Christianity’s most precious contribution to human life – **GRACE!** Refusing God’s forgiveness is a terrible insult, one that can separate someone from God **FOREVER.** That is the definition of **HELL!**

Hebrews says we must “lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely...” That includes Regret. This is a good time to take stock of our lives, pray and meditate on what God would have us do to get off to a great start this year. Perhaps there are some regrets that have been dragging you down even worse than an extra fifty pounds.

Why not make a resolution, but now one of those lame wishes. Let’s make a real commitment to making positive change in our lives. There may be other things that are your important changes you need to make. Whether it is “**Letting Go of...**” **Regret** or something else, now is a great time to make a new start with a new commitment and a new plan that can help you reach this goal. Together, we can help each other reach our goals. In a few weeks or months you will be glad you did.