

# What Do You Regret?

Years ago I encountered a word of wisdom: “At the end of our lives, what we will regret is far more about what we *didn't* do, than what we did.” And then recently, in a conversation about what “youngers” want to learn from “olders,” a colleague said he wanted to know what we regret so he can learn from our lessons the wiser way (observation) instead of the hard way (personal experience). So I’ve been asking.



The answers fell in these categories:

## **Missed Time and Opportunities**

- I regret not spending more time with my parents and immediate family when I could.
- I regret not asking enough questions of my parents and grandparents when they were still here. There is so much more I would like to know from them.
- I regret all the time I wasted looking for a man, dating and fretting over relationships. If I had it to do over, I would invest my time and energy differently. I would spend more time in study of the Word, pour into and serve more freely in ministry and take mission trips! I would've trusted God more and Matthew 6:33.
- I regret not making Christ-centered connections earlier

in my life.

- I regret not making connections to Christian organizations (including the church) earlier, and not getting help understanding the Bible.
- I regret not having a mentor.
- I regret not going to the Holy Land sooner.
- I regret not taking advantage of the opportunity to sightsee when on business trips.
- I regret letting work consume me. I regret not traveling because work was too big a part of my life.
- I regret not getting counseling to help me process and grieve my father's murder.
- I regret not learning as much as possible when I had willing teachers. The thought of sitting in a room with peers discussing a book sounds like heaven now, but in school it felt like torture. I did not appreciate the luxury of education then, and now I would LOVE to go back to school for another degree.

### **Seeking to Please People Instead of God**

- I regret spending so much of my younger life being a people pleaser and carrying around burdens that weren't mine to carry.
- I regret being motivated by pleasing people instead of God—even godly people. People can counsel us, but we shouldn't put them in God's place.
- I regret worrying more about what people thought of me than worrying about what God thought of me.
- I regret “performing” for others instead of being true to me.
- I regret all the times I silenced myself at church in order to be the good pastor wife. I didn't even realize how it was slowly poisoning me.

### **Parenting**

- I regret not spending time with my kids instead of

trying to provide more things for my kids.

- I regret the time I wasted doing menial tasks that really didn't matter instead of sitting down longer with my boys. I also regret being too quick to speak and argue when they were teenagers. I wish I had been calmer and sought out conversation instead of confrontation.
- I regret wanting my little ones to be perfect in EVERYTHING they did instead of letting them just be kids, and spending way too much time on the daily tasks of housekeeping instead of using my time wisely to nurture them and being their spiritual leader and teaching them more about Jesus instead of making sure each toy was in place. Also being so strict on them when they were young and not realizing I couldn't control their reactions; that I needed to teach them how to react. Oh, and I used to yell at them as a young mom (because that's what I was taught) but I learned to control my reactions because I don't like to be yelled at, and to speak softly and with respect to each of them, using "sir" and "ma'am" with them as I do today with my grandchildren.
- I regret believing the lie that you should let your kids choose their own religion.
- I regret not creating a family culture when my kids were small.
- I regret not getting counseling for our son when he started into a downward spiral in middle school.
- I regret destroying my relationship with our then-13 year old son because he was failing in school and I was so afraid for his future! I reacted in such destructive ways until a pastor of mine told me, "Dear one, there is no vacancy in the Trinity. The position of the Holy Spirit has been filled!" That began a very long walk back toward a forgiven and reconciled relationship with that now 39-year old son who graduated from college, was in the army for almost 7 years and is now a sergeant in a police force and married with four kids. Thank You

Lord Jesus for your grace and mercy toward us all. You are infinitely better at your job than any of us ever could be.

## Relationships

- I regret “mind-reading” what I thought others believed about me and reacted as if those beliefs were true...only to go to reunions years later, find out what people actually thought... and realized I could have had a way cooler high school and college experience had I just asked people outright what they thought instead of assuming instead.
- I regret so much that when I saw evidence in my first marriage that something was wrong, I did not fervently ask God to show me what was wrong. I regret it took me over twenty-five years to question red flags in the marriage. I regret not holding my husband accountable for decisions he made, especially financial decisions, and for not pursuing accountability with other believers. I regret that I did not question why, in our Christian culture, submission is confused with inferiority-and therefore a woman can't question any major financial decision her husband does in secret without accountability to his wife.
- I regret every single time I asked a newly married couple when they would have kids. Infertility gives perspective.
- I regret not standing up to an abusive teacher in high school and not reporting him, and I regret years of thinking I was just a bad kid.
- I regret being mean to my wife and kids.
- I regret not asking my husband to help me more with the kids and the house. I didn't ask, and then I got resentful for him not doing what I never asked him to do. I regret shutting him out of my heart and big chunks of my life.

## Body

- I regret not memorizing more scripture before mom brain and autoimmune issues took my good memory.
- I regret not taking better care of my body, especially now that I'm pushing 60. It would have been so much easier if I had just worked at it a little bit each day.
- I regret not realizing you could have sculpted muscles at 80; if I had known I would have exercised more starting much younger.
- I regret not going to the dentist more when I was still under my mom's insurance.
- I regret piercing my belly button myself with a needle and an ice cube. Not really for any reason except for sure my daughter is gonna try it.

## Spiritual Life

- I regret buying the lies of the culture rather than the truth of God.
- I regret being so afraid of not having enough money (which is really about not trusting God) that I squelched my husband's generosity.
- I regret not learning sooner that I need to depend on the Lord and not myself.
- I regret the sin of self-reliance.
- I regret not allowing scripture to show me what I was really like.
- I regret allowing sin to become an addiction that took joy from my life and replaced it with shame and guilt.
- I regret that I got in God's way many times . . . when God says in His word says, "I've got this all under control, I have a plan for your life, trust in me with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding, rest in Me, Be still . . ." I have done the opposite more times than I can count. So instead of leaning in on Him and watching what He can/could do, I thought I could handle whatever was going on better and faster and tried

and failed. (Still working on this, some of us take a little longer to learn.) God has shown me that even when I get in His way, He forgives, He still has a plan, He is still in control, He gives me strength to sit back and wait on Him, that I can change my heart and let go, and trust Him and rest in Him. As His children, He will never let us go . . . Rest and wait on Him, His ways are always better.

- I regret not learning how to really capture my thoughts and rebuke them with scripture. I learned a little too late that I can choose, truly choose what is in my mind. So many things would have been different . . .
- I regret not attending a healthy Bible-teaching church when I was younger.

Of course, we can't learn all our lessons from other people's mistakes. One especially wise friend wrote, "I know that we can, with God's Spirit in us, learn to avoid many things, and wise counsel helps. But until I had matured more and understood the value of certain things and perspective on others, things older believers shared were often more in my head than taken to heart."

Some examples of regrets that just might have to be learned the hard way:

- I regret indulging and not grasping consequences of every big and little choice.
- I regret listening to legalistic people when I was more vulnerable to toxic religion.
- I regret blowing opportunities, self-imposed insecurity, bad decisions and choices.
- I regret getting upset over really insignificant things.

Finally, for a redemptive view of regrets, this wisdom from a believer who owns the truth of Romans 8:28, that God is able to make all regrets work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose:

“Sue, I think if you live long enough you realize there is a step beyond regret, and it’s thankfulness. Every regret that I would have spoken of, God has used to change me and grow me. As I look back on them all, my heart is full of joy that God has been a part of my life for 47 years. He has brought me out of the mire and filled me up with acceptance of what it’s like to live in this world and that He uses it all. And I thank Him for His goodness.”

What do you regret?

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