

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa 232-29 Christian Life: Dealing with Past Failures

Anyone who operates a vehicle understands how important it is to have a good rearview mirror. The mirror helps the driver and warns him about what is approaching from behind. Ignoring the rearview mirror, or perhaps giving it too much attention, will endanger everyone in the vehicle. In the same way, if a person constantly thinks about the past and ignores God's forgiveness, they will be traveling a dangerous path. The best solution for regret about the past is to *accept* God's forgiveness. The apostle Paul stated: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14).

Holding onto regrets causes one to ignore or deny the forgiveness of God. It can lead them to believe that they need to punish themselves for their sins. Regret can lower self-esteem and tell us that other people have the right to punish or shame us. These actions deny the power of the blood of Jesus Christ, which is the *only* payment for our sins. Our regrets should remind us to be alert and of sober mind. Our enemy the devil prowls around "like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1Peter 5:8). Remembering this will help a person not to make similar mistakes or failures in the future.

The Gospel of Luke tells a story about how people rejected a woman who was accepted and forgiven by Jesus. She had a sinful past, but perhaps she had heard Jesus preach and had decided to lead a new life. Her actions toward Jesus showed her love and gratitude.

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went and reclined at his table. A woman in that town, who had lived a sinful life, learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. She came there with an expensive jar of perfume. She stood behind Jesus, at his feet, weeping. She began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them.

When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to tell you. ... Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

Jesus said to Simon, "You have judged correctly. ... Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But

whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. ... Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:36-50). The woman in this story was seen by those present as sinful, foolish, and wasteful. Except for Jesus. They remembered her for the sins she had done and not what Christ had done for her.

Counsel people who come to you, using the story of this woman whose faith saved her. Ask them to try to remember these things:

- People may not forgive you. They may even work to get others to believe you do not belong in the company of Christ.
- The cause of Christ can be harmed, when others do not accept God’s forgiveness of your past.
- Even your show of gratitude for the forgiveness of Christ may be questioned.
- You can follow the example of this woman. Her actions and thoughts reflected the freedom she felt as one forgiven by Christ. The story indicates she paid no attention to the comments of others. Her eyes were firmly and fully fixed on Jesus.

All of us have things in our past we are not proud of. Remember, God’s forgiveness is complete and forever. There is no place for holding onto guilt and regret. Move forward in the grace God has given. Here is another important thing to remember. In your counseling, you can repeat this to a person struggling with guilt and regret. “Let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor. Then you can remain strong against the devil’s evil plans. Our fight is not against human beings. It is against the rulers, the authorities and the powers of the unseen world. It is against the spiritual forces of evil. So put on all of God’s armor, so you can resist the enemy when evil days come. Then after the battle, you will still be standing firm” (paraphrase of Eph 6:10-13).

Being forgiven by God is sure and permanent, as soon as a person repents and asks his forgiveness. No one can control another’s thoughts, actions or attitudes. But like the woman in the story, a person can keep their eyes on Jesus, not on the unkindness of others.

You can bring comfort to those struggling with their past by sharing with them the following:

- Those who judge you have also sinned and come short of the glory of God.
- There is no temptation that has come to you that is not common to everyone.
- God recognizes you as his child; he does not remember your failures.
- Those who have forgiven you may still find it difficult to trust you.
- Ask for forgiveness from those you may have hurt in the past. Accept their decision to forgive you or not. Go on in peace and leave them in God’s hands.
- The way some people remember you may never change, but Jesus’ love never fails.
- Constantly “looking in the rearview mirror” of past failures hinders your ability to move forward with Jesus.

This lesson is **important** because it helps you to counsel people who cannot forget their former lives of sin. The result of such thinking can cause them to feel paralyzed and condemned or

unlovable. Instead they should view themselves as the forgiven children of God, because of the work of Christ on the Cross.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that as God's child you are forgiven of your past faults and failures. Even though people may remember your past, God says you are forgiven because of the sacrifice of Christ, your Savior.

To **review** this lesson, answer the following questions.

1. How did the people in this story remember the woman who cried at the feet of Jesus? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "They remembered her for the sins she had committed," you are correct.

2. What may hinder a person's ability to move forward with Christ? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "A person's constantly looking back at past failures may hinder their ability to move forward with Christ," you answered correctly.

3. In the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet, what did her actions show about her? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Her actions showed she was keeping her eyes on Jesus," you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it several times. Learn the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet and tell it to another believer in your own words. Then discuss together your own experiences with the devil's temptations to look back at your sinful past. What should you do instead? You should focus on Jesus and the new life he has given you. Pray together with your friend, asking God to help you counsel someone else to be victorious over their doubts.