

Stephen Arterburn: Living Without Regret

What is keeping you stuck in an emotional or spiritual rut?  Is it regret and guilt? Christian counselor, author and radio host Stephen Arterburn believes we can break free from the regret of our past. In his new book, Regret-Free Living, Arterburn openly shares his biggest regrets, how he was able to overcome them and the ways God actually used them in his life. Arterburn teaches how we can make peace with the past and embrace emotional and spiritual freedom.

We talked with Arterburn about his latest book. (Click here to purchase Regret-Free Living.)

What inspired you to tackle the subject of regret?

Stephen Arterburn: Since the economic downturn, I have seen so many more people regretting decisions they [have] made over the past decade, regretting they did not save more or invest better. But people who call our *NewLife Live* radio program are always full of regret about the mate they picked, the way they raised their children, the affair that destroyed their marriage. It just seemed like the right time to tackle how to live beyond our regrets. And surprisingly that led me down the road to look at relationships from a different angle.

You mention in the book that you know about regret firsthand. Can you share about that?

Arterburn: The regrets [that] I have had to call upon Jesus to help me shed are too numerous to count. The biggest regret of my life is having paid for an abortion when I was 19. But the ones that hurt the most in recent years—the ones I've had to work hardest to overcome—are those that resulted from relationships that didn't work out as I'd meant them to. I've

made big blunders on the job and had judgment errors with finances, but relationships have caused me the deepest pain. With God's help, I have come to understand that I was blind to my contribution to the relationship problems I've had; I simply wasn't then the man I am today.

Why is it important for a person to forgive himself or herself?

Arterburn: Jesus went to a lot of trouble so you could forgive yourself. If you can't forgive yourself, you are denying that Christ died for you. Stuck in your guilt and shame, you are not going to do much for the kingdom of God, and every relationship you have will be tainted by the guilt. Surrender your bitterness toward yourself and you will become less judgmental and more accepting and loving toward others. Dave Stoop wrote a wonderful book called *Forgiving the Unforgivable*. It helped when I read it years ago, and I have recommended it to thousands of people.

What types of problems do unforgiveness and regret bring into a relationship?

Arterburn: Disconnection: That is the big one. If I am ashamed, I am not going to connect in a healthy way in a healthy relationship. I will never achieve the intimacy level that makes a relationship so worth it. You feel like a fraud and a fake because in some ways you are. When you surrender your guilt and your regretful choices to God, you open yourself up to a different way of living.

One chapter is devoted to knowing when to end a relationship. Why is that important to know?

Arterburn: Some relationships are harmful and destructive, and if you can get out now, you will prevent a crummy business partnership or a marriage full of regret. I admire those who stand before a packed church and tell people they have made a mistake and the marriage is not going to happen, and we are

sending back the gifts. We are too casual about our relational choices, and that is one of the key reasons there is so much divorce. And if you have ever been through divorce, you know it is one of the most painful processes you will ever have to endure.

What other projects are you working on?

Arterburn: We have had meetings with FOX, NBC, ABC, Sony and Warner Bros. about a television show using our values and our tag-team counseling we do on *NewLife Live*. I'm working on my next book, which is about sacrificial love and commitment. Also, there is a new Bible project called *Our New Life Together*, which is for married couples, to help them get it right from the beginning or fix what is broken in the middle. And I'm working toward a Ph.D. in Christian counseling. But my biggest project is raising my kids: 18, 11, 10, 3 and 3 months.

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