

# Turn Your Regret Into Redemption

This past Sunday was the one-year anniversary of my mother's home-going. She left us five days before her eighty-first birthday. Over the past year, I can't even count the number of times I went to call her. The trigger might have been as simple as the melody of her favorite Christmas song or seeing something I know she would like. Then just as quickly, I remembered she was gone.

To say that my mother and I had relational challenges might be an understatement of grand proportions. As far back as I can remember, there had been an undercurrent of tension between us. Over the last 10 years, I avoided calling her because calls would often escalate into fights. And yet even now, I am hard-pressed to remember the harsh words that passed between us.

What I do remember are the words I didn't say.

I wish I'd been more intentional to show and tell her I loved her. When it came to expressing love, my mother and I spoke languages as different as Italian and English. Sadly, I refused to become bilingual until much too late. Yes, in the last month of her life I said all the things I wished I had. I told her I loved her. I asked her to forgive me for any and every grievance, large or small. As I held onto her frail frame, tethered to the hospital bed by tubes and wires, she leaned into my ear and graciously whispered my reprieve. That's when the levee broke. We both cried, overwhelmed by the knowledge we had so little time to live this love out this side of eternity. Less than a month later, she was gone.

I'm glad I have the promise of eternity—it softened the blow of this reality. But even so, regret can be a hard taskmaster.

I've often responded to its accusations and remorse by either making excuses or casting blame. But over the years, I've learned to handle it with a different approach: owning my mistakes. Though at first it proves the more painful option, I can promise you, it saves so much unnecessary hurt in the long run. The truth is I should have loved my mother better and sooner. I was in the stronger position to love her well and I didn't. Although I can't change the past, I am left with a clear choice going forward. I can feel bad and the sadness will stay with me, or I can flip my mistakes into lessons for others. You see, once you own up to a mistake, it no longer owns you. The psalmist David discovered this long ago.

Ps. 51 reveals the process of how to move from regret to redemption: "You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You make me to know wisdom. ... Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You" (Ps. 51:6,13).

When we bury our regrets, we rob others of the chance to learn from them. In repenting and offering our stories to those around us, we find something beautiful springs from our failures. Please allow my mistakes to be your instructor and love well while you can. Be kind while it is in your power. Be generous in word and deed. Look beyond the actions and search for the heart of the matter. This Christmas, have the hard talks. Reconcile. Own your part even if they refuse to own theirs. You will never regret kind words, warmth or acts of generosity—but you will regret the love you never gave. {eo}

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