

Summary and Spiritual Themes

1. **Introduction**
 - Start with a personal or relatable story about carrying regrets.
 - Highlight the hope found in Jesus' promise of forgiveness.
2. **Acknowledging Regrets**
 - **Theme:** Honest self-examination and acknowledgment of past mistakes open the door to forgiveness.
 - **Biblical Character: Peter** - After denying Jesus, Peter wept bitterly but ultimately found forgiveness and restoration (Luke 22:54-62, John 21:15-17).
 - **Analogy:** Regrets are like heavy backpacks; the longer we carry them, the harder it becomes to move forward. Jesus offers to take our burdens.
 - **Scripture:** Romans 7:24-25, Matthew 11:28-30.
3. **What Do We Normally Do with Regrets?**
 - Avoid, deny, or let them weigh us down.
 - Share Peter's and David's initial struggles with regret.
4. **What Should We Do with Regrets?**
 - Recognize and confess them to God (Psalm 51).
 - Use the thief on the cross as an example of surrender.
5. **What Does God Want to Do with Our Regrets?**
 - Forgive and transform them into testimonies of His grace.
 - Highlight Paul's transformation and his role as a vessel of grace.
6. **Receiving God's Forgiveness**
 - **Theme:** God's forgiveness is a gift offered through Jesus, requiring humility and faith to accept.
 - **Biblical Character: The Thief on the Cross** - He asked Jesus to remember him, demonstrating faith and humility (Luke 23:39-43).
 - **Analogy:** Forgiveness is like a clean slate in a classroom; no matter how messy it gets, the teacher can erase it completely.
 - **Scripture:** Ephesians 1:7, 1 John 1:9.
7. **Releasing Regrets to God**
 - **Theme:** Surrendering our regrets to God allows Him to heal and transform us.
 - **Biblical Character: David** - After his sin with Bathsheba, David confessed and found restoration through God's mercy (Psalm 51).
 - **Analogy:** A cracked pot, when placed in the hands of the potter, can be mended into something new and even more beautiful.
 - **Scripture:** Isaiah 64:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17.
8. **How Does God Change Us?**
 - Through forgiveness, He gives us a new identity and purpose.
 - Encourage the congregation to live in the hope and freedom of God's grace.
9. **Living in God's Grace**
 - **Theme:** God's grace not only forgives but also empowers us to live with hope and purpose.
 - **Biblical Character: Paul** - Once a persecutor of Christians, Paul became a champion of the Gospel through the transformative power of grace (1 Timothy 1:12-17).
 - **Analogy:** Grace is like the morning sun breaking through the darkness, illuminating a new path forward.
 - **Scripture:** Romans 15:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

Key Scriptures for Emphasis

- **Romans 15:4-13:** Hope and encouragement through the Scriptures and Christ's work.
- **Luke 23:26-43:** Jesus' forgiveness and promise to the thief on the cross.
- **Psalm 103:12:** God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west.

Conclusion:

- Reassure that it's never too late to be forgiven.
- End with an invitation to reflect, repent, and embrace God's grace in Jesus.

Story: The Weight of the Stone

In a small village, a man named Elias was known for carrying a heavy stone wherever he went. The stone, a dark and jagged boulder, symbolized the mistakes he had made in life. Years of selfishness, harsh words, and broken promises had led Elias to believe that this weight was his to bear forever.

The villagers often asked Elias why he didn't simply leave the stone behind. "It's mine," he would reply. "I deserve this. What's done is done. There's no way to undo it."

One day, a kind stranger arrived in the village. His eyes were filled with compassion, and his hands were calloused from years of helping others. He approached Elias and said, "Why do you carry this stone?" Elias sighed. "Because I've failed too many times. This stone reminds me of who I am." The stranger smiled. "What if I told you that it's not too late to leave this burden behind? You don't need to carry it anymore."

Elias shook his head. "How could that be possible? My mistakes cannot be erased." The stranger knelt and gently touched the stone. "There's someone who has already carried this weight for you. His name is Jesus. He bore all your regrets, all your failures, on the cross. You don't have to carry this anymore because He has already forgiven you." The words pierced Elias's heart. He thought of the thief on the cross who, in his final moments, asked Jesus to remember him. Even at the edge of death, Jesus forgave him and promised him paradise. If it wasn't too late for the thief, could it also not be too late for Elias?

The stranger continued, "Jesus didn't just take your burden to remove it; He did so to give you hope and a future. Imagine what your life could be if you walked free of this stone." Tears filled Elias's eyes. "What must I do?" "Lay it down," the stranger said. "Trust in Jesus. Receive His grace. And walk in His light." Elias hesitated but finally let go. The stone fell to the ground, and he felt an incredible lightness. It was as though a new dawn had broken within him. For the first time in years, he smiled.

Biblical Themes

1. Carrying the Weight of Regret

- Elias's stone symbolizes the guilt and regret we often carry. Like Peter, who denied Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62), we can feel the weight of our failures deeply.

2. Jesus as the Burden Bearer

- The stranger's words reflect Jesus' promise: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
- The story of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) underscores that it's never too late to receive forgiveness.

3. Laying Down Regrets

- Elias's act of releasing the stone mirrors David's confession in Psalm 51: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

4. Hope for Transformation

- Elias's newfound freedom reflects Paul's transformation after his encounter with Christ: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Analogies to Enhance the Message

- **The Heavy Backpack:** Regret is like a backpack filled with rocks. The longer we carry it, the more it weighs us down. Jesus offers to remove every stone and replace it with His peace.
- **The Cracked Pot:** Like a pot that is mended, God doesn't discard us; He transforms us, making our lives more beautiful and purposeful.
- **The Morning Sun:** Regret can feel like a long night, but forgiveness through Jesus is the morning sun that breaks through, offering hope and a fresh start.

Reflection for the Season of Hope: Elias's story reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. It's not too late to let go of regret, receive forgiveness, and embrace the new life Jesus offers. This season, may we remember that the cross is not the end—it is the beginning of hope, healing, and transformation.

It's Not Too Late

A shadow lingers, the weight of the past,
Whispers of failures that seem to outlast.
But a voice calls softly, tender and true,
"Child, lay down your burdens, I'm here for you."

The stone of regret, so heavy, so worn,
Cuts through the heart, leaving it torn.
Yet grace flows freely, like rivers that start,
To cleanse the weary and heal the heart.
On a rugged cross, through anguish and pain,
Love bore the sorrow, dissolved every stain.
The thief who hung in darkness beside,
Found paradise promised before he died.
Regret has no power where mercy is found,
Chains are undone, hearts unbound.
For Christ has spoken, "Come as you are,
My grace is enough, no matter how far."
The dawn breaks brightly, the old fades away,
New mercies rise with each morning's ray.
Hope takes its place where despair once grew,
For God makes all things beautiful and new.
So lift up your eyes, let go of the weight,
Step into His love—it's not too late.
In Christ, there's a future, a life made whole,
Grace redeems, restores, and saves the soul.



This visual representation of grace and hope, embodying themes of forgiveness, renewal, and divine transformation. I hope it resonates with your spiritual vision.

Spiritual Quote: "God's grace is greater than your regrets, and His mercy transforms every broken piece into a masterpiece of hope."

Christian Song: "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" by Chris Tomlin

This modern rendition of the classic hymn beautifully captures the themes of grace, hope, and the freedom found in Christ's forgiveness.

Challenge Question to Ponder (with Hope in Jesus):

"What burden of regret are you still carrying, and how might your life change if you fully trusted Jesus—the One who carried your sins to the cross—to lift it from you today and replace it with His peace?"

Scriptural Support for Hope in Jesus:

- **Matthew 11:28-30:** *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*
- **Romans 15:13:** *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."*

The cross reminds us that no burden is too heavy, no regret too great, for Jesus to transform into hope, healing, and renewal.

An Invitation to Receive the Good News of Jesus:

At **Hope Lutheran Church, Phoenix, AZ**, we believe that the greatest gift anyone can receive is the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is the message of God's grace, love, and forgiveness, freely offered to all who come to Him in faith.

- Are you seeking peace, purpose, or hope in your life?
- Do you long for a fresh start or a deeper connection with God?

Jesus offers this to you. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has opened the door to new life—a life of freedom from sin, renewal in spirit, and eternal hope. At Hope Lutheran, we invite you to come and experience this life-transforming message. Whether you've been walking with Jesus for years or are just beginning to explore faith, there's a place for you here.

Join us in hearing the Good News:

- **Forgiveness:** In Christ, our sins are washed away.
- **Love:** God's love is unconditional and never-ending.
- **Hope:** No matter what you're facing, there's always hope in Him.

You are warmly welcomed to worship with us, grow in faith, and be part of a community that lives out this Good News daily. **Come and receive the love of Jesus, the hope of salvation, and the joy of a life transformed.** We look forward to meeting you and sharing this journey of faith together!

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Traditional Service 8:00 am

Contemporary Services 9:30 & 11:00 am

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7-Day Devotional: “It’s Not Too Late”

Each day is based on themes of grace, forgiveness, and hope in Jesus. Every devotion includes a story, spiritual points, a Scripture reference, an analogy, and a prayer.

Day 1: The Burden We Carry

Story: Elias carries a heavy stone, representing his regrets, everywhere he goes. He believes it is his penance for past failures.

Scripture: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)*

Spiritual Point: We often carry burdens of regret that Christ has already borne on the cross.

Analogy: Regret is like carrying a backpack filled with rocks—each mistake adding weight until it becomes unbearable. Jesus offers to take that load off our shoulders.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am tired of carrying my burdens. Teach me to lay them down at the cross, trusting in Jesus’ love and forgiveness. Amen.

Day 2: The Promise of Grace

Story: A child breaks a precious vase but is met with love and forgiveness from their parent instead of anger. The parent says, “The vase is broken, but our relationship is whole.”

Scripture: *“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)*

Spiritual Point: God’s grace is greater than our worst mistakes. He values restoring us over condemning us.

Analogy: God’s grace is like a potter mending a cracked pot—not discarding it, but turning it into something even more beautiful.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for loving me even in my brokenness. Help me to accept Your grace and live in the freedom of Your forgiveness. Amen.

Day 3: The Turning Point

Story: Elias meets a stranger who tells him, “It’s not too late to leave the stone behind. Someone has already carried it for you.”

Scripture: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)*

Spiritual Point: Confession and surrender are the first steps to freedom in Christ.

Analogy: Turning to Jesus is like stepping out of a dark room into sunlight—it requires us to open the door and trust the light.

Prayer: Jesus, I confess my sins and my regrets to You. Help me to surrender fully to Your love and walk in Your forgiveness. Amen.

Day 4: The Cross and the Thief

Story: The thief on the cross, moments from death, asks Jesus to remember him. Jesus responds, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

Scripture: *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)*

Spiritual Point: It is never too late to receive God’s forgiveness, no matter how far we’ve strayed.

Analogy: God’s grace is like the sunrise—it comes faithfully each day, no matter how dark the night has been.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the hope of the cross. Remind me that Your forgiveness is always available, even in my darkest moments. Amen.

Day 5: Letting Go of the Stone

Story: Elias hesitates but finally let's go of his stone. Immediately, he feels lighter, as though his heart has been set free.

Scripture: *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Spiritual Point: Letting go of regret allows God to replace it with His peace and purpose.

Analogy: Holding onto regret is like clutching a thorny branch—it only hurts you. Letting go allows healing.

Prayer: Father, I let go of my regrets and trust You to make me new. Fill me with Your peace and guide me in Your purpose. Amen.

Day 6: A Life Transformed

Story: Freed from his burden, Elias begins to notice the beauty of life around him. He helps others in the village who are also weighed down, sharing the message of grace.

Scripture: *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:10)

Spiritual Point: God transforms our lives so we can share His grace with others.

Analogy: Like a seed planted in soil, a life surrendered to Christ grows and bears fruit to bless others.

Prayer: Lord, use my life to reflect Your grace. Help me to share Your love and hope with those who are burdened. Amen.

Day 7: The God of Hope

Story: Elias looks back and realizes that the stone he carried is no longer a part of his life. Instead, he walks in freedom, knowing that God's grace is sufficient for every day ahead.

Scripture: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."* (Romans 15:13)

Spiritual Point: In Christ, we have a hope that transforms our past, renews our present, and secures our future.

Analogy: Hope in Jesus is like a lighthouse—it guides us safely through life's storms, keeping us anchored in His love.

Prayer: God of hope, fill me with Your joy and peace. Let my life abound in the hope that comes through Jesus and help me to share it with others. Amen.

This 7-day journey helps reflect on the themes of grace, forgiveness, and hope in Jesus, encouraging believers to trust Him and live in the freedom He offers.