

Regret: The Burden and the Blessings, by Robin McMilin, LCSW



An Indian Swami once wrote, “Do not brood over your past mistakes and failures, as this will only fill your mind with grief, regret and depression.” Many people, as they age, begin to reflect and question their choices from the past....I should have stayed in school... waited to get married...changed jobs... spent more time with the family... moved...and so on. Not only is this an exhausting exercise, but a dangerous one.

The urge to look back and question decisions made long ago, that we have no power to change, is one of the most direct roads to depression. This form of regret may claim to be insight, but it primarily denies the good of “what has been” for the sake of “what was not.” It drags us down, leaving us in a fantasy world of what ifs and pining for a life we do not have. **Moreover, our thoughts, emotions, and attitudes are key determinants of how we age.** When this burden of regret begins, not only does the past disappoint us, but often it sours the present too.

One of the blessings of maturing is becoming comfortable with the self we are, rather than to mourn what we are not. As we become wise with age and experience, we begin to understand that mistakes, failures, and less than ideal choices we have made, are opportunities for personal growth and change.

Joan Chittister in her book *The Gift of Years* suggests,

The **burden** of regret is that, unless we come to understand the values of the choices we made in the past, we may fail to see the gifts they have brought us. The **blessing** of regret is clear—it brings us, if we are willing to face it head on, to the point of being present to this new time of life in an entirely new way. It urges us to continue becoming.

Seeking meaningful ways to make the most of your present? Contact Lise Lapidus Grace to become a CJFS Volunteer. Want to move beyond the burden of regret and toward its blessing? Contact Robin McMilin for CJFS Counseling. 205.879.3438