

## ***Ten Major Causes of Failure – Part IV – “Procrastination”***

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The devotional, *Our Daily Bread* tells of an incident from the American Revolution that illustrates the tragedy that can result from procrastination. It is reported that Colonel Rahl, commander of the British troops in Trenton, New Jersey, was playing cards when a courier brought an urgent message stating that General George Washington was crossing the Delaware River.

Rahl put the letter in his pocket and didn't bother to read it until the game was finished. Then, realizing the seriousness of the situation, he hurriedly tried to rally his men to meet the coming attack, but his procrastination was his undoing. He and many of his men were killed and the rest of the regiment were captured.

The devotional concludes with these words, "Only a few minutes' delay cost him his life, his honor, and the freedom of his soldiers. Earth's history is strewn with the wrecks of half-finished plans and unexecuted resolutions. 'Tomorrow' is the excuse of the lazy and refuge of the incompetent."

Why do people procrastinate? We do we put off the important? Why do we delay doing the things that are necessary?

### **Causes of Procrastination**

In the message we are going to look at five causes of procrastination and then look at the solution to procrastination.

#### *1. Worldly entanglement.*

In Genesis chapter 18 we find the story of three men meeting with Abraham. Two of the men were angels and the third was an Old Testament appearance of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Abraham showed them hospitality by preparing a meal and it was at this time that God reveals to Abraham that he would have a son, the son of promise, in his old age.

After the meal the men get up and look in the direction of the city of Sodom. The Lord tells Abraham in 18:20 (paraphrased) that *“because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down and deal with it.”* God was about to rain down fire and brimstone upon the city of Sodom for its great wickedness.

It is in this section of Scripture where we find that classic conversation between Abraham and God where Abraham attempts to negotiate with God in order that mercy may be shown to Abraham's nephew Lot and his family who lived in Sodom.

Abraham says to God, *“Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”*

The LORD responds, *“If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”*

Abraham says, *“How about 45?...”* This goes on for a while: *“How about 40?....30?...20?...10?”*

God answers, *“I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.”*

In chapter 19 we find that God decides to destroy the city of Sodom. Sadly, God could not even find ten righteous persons in Sodom.

Sodom had become so wicked that the perversion of homosexuality was openly and unashamedly practiced. It had gotten to the point that when God's messengers visited the city the male residents of the city with their perverted desires went after them. In fact, when Lot offered to give his daughters to them—they rejected his offer.

While homosexuality was the primary reason for Sodom's destruction, it wasn't the only reason why God destroyed the city. We find out a little more about the reason why God judged this city in Jeremiah 23:14.

In this passage God says (commenting on the prophets of Jerusalem), *"Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah."*

Back in Genesis, while God decides to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He also decides to show mercy to Lot and his family. He sends in messengers—angels to warn them to flee from the wrath to come.

*Gen 19:12 Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city; take them out of this place!"*

*Gen 19:13 "For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it."*

*Gen 19:14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!" But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking.*

*Gen 19:15 When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city."*

Notice verse 16: *"And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city."*

When the angels tried to get Lot out of Sodom before God judged it, Lot lingered; he hesitated; he delayed; he procrastinated. His lingering almost cost him his life. If it wasn't for the angels taking hold of his hand, and the hands of his wife and two daughters, they all would have been incinerated.

Sadly to say that just a few verses later in this same chapter (vs. 26) we find that Lot's wife, looked back and became a pillar of salt.

Why did Lot have a hard time leaving? Why did "Mrs. Lot" look back and lose her life? They had become entangled in the things of Sodom.

When God first called Abraham—Abraham took his nephew Lot with them. There was some strife between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen so they split up. They had to choose where each group would settle so Abraham gave Lot the first choice of land. Genesis 13:10 tells us that *"Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. (this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)"*

There were obviously a lot of pleasures associated with Sodom—and it was these pleasurable things that entangled Mr. and Mrs. Lot, their daughters and son-in-laws. It is the pleasurable things of life that entangle us as well.

In Luke 8 Jesus is teaching who the seed of the Word of God is impacted by the world. In verse 14 He says, “*Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*”

Listen to what the Bible says concerning Moses. “*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*” (Hebrews 11:24-27)

When told to leave the wicked city of Sodom, Lot procrastinated because of worldly entanglements and just like Lot, we procrastinate because of the cares of this life.

Many of the commandments of the Lord go unheeded because of the procrastination that is related to our desires for the things of the world.

How many of us have missed out on midweek Bible Study because our favorite show was coming on that evening?

How many of us still have not connected with a LIFE Group because of procrastination? Several said they would attend but haven't. Several even went as far as signing up but have not showed up. We've even have those who've gotten books from us but never made it out. Could procrastination be the reason?

We have good intentions—we say “*one day I'm going to do it;*” “*One day I'm going to show up.*” Someone has said, “*The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.*” You see, the devil doesn't care how much we do, as long as we don't do it today.

In this world, when you try to please Christ, something will always challenge your intentions. This is why the Apostle Paul tells us that one characteristic of a good soldier of Jesus Christ is that he doesn't allow the affairs of this life to entangle him.

*2 Tim 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

*2 Tim 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

Is there anything keeping you from being a good soldier of Jesus Christ? Are worldly entanglements causing you to procrastinate?

## *2. Family cares*

How many of us have put off something that needed to be done like a car repair? There is an auto glass repair company that runs the commercial about a man who had a small crack in his windshield; over time this crack spread and eventually caused the windshield to collapse into a thousand pieces.

Too often we make the mistake of saying to ourselves and others, “*I'll get to it when I have some time.*” Some years ago another car repair company ran a commercial that ended with a mechanic saying, “*Pay me now or pay me later.*” You can pay someone \$30 dollars every 3 months to change your oil or you throw down \$3000 to replace your engine—you have a choice.

Over the years I've encouraged parents to take the time to make Christ known to their children and much too often I've seen many of them procrastinate—*"Pastor Chuck, one of these days you are going to see us sitting in your church—were going to surprise you."* Those same words from the car mechanic comes to my mind as I see the children of these parents who have now grown up to be rebellious teenagers, *"Pay me now or pay me later."*

In the Gospel of Luke, there is the story of a scribe who is called by Jesus to follow Him.

In Luke 9:59 Jesus says to this scribe, *"Follow Me."* The scribe responds, *"Lord, let me first go and bury my father."* Jesus says to him, *"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."*

Was Jesus being insensitive here? No. The truth of the matter is that this scribe's father had not yet died. The scribe was telling Jesus that he needed to wait for his father to die so he could get his inheritance. This scribe was more interested in his inheritance than in following Jesus.

Like this scribe, many have allowed family matters to cause them to procrastinate—to put off for a later time the important things that need to be done today.

In Luke 9:61 another says to Jesus, *"Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."*

This is like the man who tells everyone he is enlisting in the military but doesn't sign up until his family has put together a going away party for him. It's like the man who wants to get married but not without a few more nights of sowing his wild oats as a bachelor.

Jesus says to folks like these, *"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62)

How many young people have sensed the call to enter Christian service or the mission field but say, *"I've got to find myself first—there are some things I want to experience in life first and then I will give my life in fulltime service to God."*

Ecclesiastes 12:1 says to the young person, *"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'"*—“

Worldly entanglements and family cares cause people to procrastinate. Another cause of procrastination is the *deceitfulness of sin*.

### 3. *Deceitfulness of Sin*

Sin can cause you to have a false sense of security so that you will put off from doing what is right.

Hebrews 3:7-9 - *"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years.'"*

Hebrews 3:10-15 - *"Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of*

*our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

What is the writer referring to in these passages? He is referring to how people can know and experience the power of God in their lives but then let sin set in and cause them to be sluggish in their walk with Christ.

Many of us are familiar with the story of how God delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The children of Israel saw the mighty power of God as He sent ten plagues to convince Pharaoh to let His people go.

1. (Exodus 7:14–25) rivers and other water sources turned to blood killing all fish and other water life.
2. (Exodus 8:1–8:15) frogs
3. (Exodus 8:16–19) lice or gnats
4. (Exodus 8:20–30) beasts or flies
5. (Exodus 9:1–7) disease on livestock
6. (Exodus 9:8–12) boils
7. (Exodus 9:13–35) hail mixed with fire
8. (Exodus 10:1–20) locusts
9. (Exodus 10:21–29) darkness
10. (Exodus 11:1–12:36) death of the first-born of all Egyptian families.

The children of Israel beheld the power of God as He sent the pillar of cloud to guide them by day and the pillar of fire to guide them by night. They saw God fight their battles as He parted the waters of the Red Sea and caused the armies of Pharaoh to drown.

Yet they get into the wilderness and begin to complain about God's appointment of Moses to lead them. They murmured and complained about God's ability to provide for them. And then they rejected His commandments written on tablets of stone.

The more they sinned, the harder their hearts became. I can only imagine that the memories of those glorious days of God's miraculous deliverance faded from their memory the further they got away from the time when they were in Egyptian bondage.

Pretty soon, the miracles of God were regarded as myths. The plagues were spoken about as if they were folklore. It's something like that today. It's been 2000 years since Jesus Christ was on the earth and it's been 2000 thousand years since His glorious resurrection and wonderful promise that He would return for His church. People are mocking the church saying, "*Where's Jesus?*" "*I thought you said He was coming back?*"

Sin creeps in and hardens the heart. Even the church seems to have lost her hope because of the deceitfulness of sin. We put off obedience. We push aside worship. We postpone fellowship and ministry. We suspend evangelism. We no longer do what's right but replace obedience with what feels good and what is convenient to us.

In Acts 17 the Apostle Paul spoke to people whose identification with the God of Creation had gotten foggy. In the book of Genesis, a record of the beginning of the human race, we find that Adam, the first man, was very acquainted with God. The knowledge was to be passed down to his offspring but somewhere in the 4000 years between Adam and Jesus' earthly ministry this knowledge had gotten distorted.

So Paul says to these people in Acts 17:22, "*Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without*

knowing, Him I proclaim to you.” Paul goes on to teach them about God they had come to have forgotten.

*"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."* (Acts 17:24-31)

The Bible says that *"when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.'"* (verse 32)

Just like in Paul's day, today we have those who hear the good news of Jesus Christ but they mock.

Some in Paul's days said they wanted to hear more but only said this because they liked hearing the provocative—they liked hearing things that stimulated them but they never heed what they hear.

Like in Paul's day we also have others who say, "We want to hear more" but don't even come to make the decision to follow Jesus. They like their Gospel music. They have their favorite TV preachers. They like having their ears tickled. They like hearing things that make them want to shout but the deceitfulness of sin causes them to procrastinate when it comes to following Christ.

What about you? Will you let the deceitfulness of sin harden your heart to the point where you will never in this lifetime bow the knees of your heart to Jesus?

#### 4. Laziness

Laziness is another cause of procrastination.

The word procrastination means, "To put off intentionally and habitually; to put off intentionally the doing of something that should be done."

Some people just put off what ought to be done because they are lazy.

Someone has said, *"By the time the lazy person reaches his station in life, the train has left."*

Some people are like blisters—they never show up until the work is done.

Proverbs 10:4 says, *"Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth."*

The Bible says in the book of Ecclesiastes (10:18) – *"If a man is lazy, the roof rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks."*

God Word also warns us about laziness in the church. God wants us to know that "only what's done for Christ will last." When you work for Jesus Christ, when you serve Him, you are making an investment in eternity.

You don't have to worry about risk when investing in the things of Christ. God is not like Bernie Madoff and pushing a Ponzi scheme. The return on your heavenly investments are a sure thing!

Thus the writer of Hebrews says...

*Heb 6:9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.*

*Heb 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

Then he goes on to say, "Don't be lazy..."

*Heb 6:11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,*

*Heb 6:12 that you do not become sluggish/lazy, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Let me share with you one more cause of procrastination.

##### 5. Personal Convenience

*Acts 24:24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.*

*Acts 24:25 Now as Paul reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."*

Inconvenience is perhaps the number one reason people procrastinate.

- Taking time to pray is not convenient.
- Make the effort to tithe is not convenient.
- Becoming a better husband or wife is not convenient.
- Getting involved in ministry is not convenient.

Felix said to Paul, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." How many times have you said that to God?

No, we don't literally tell God to "Go away," we tell Him to "wait" by our procrastination. We say, "When I need you I will call you." And oftentimes that is exactly what when we do.

When the storms of life come we cry out like Smokie Norful, "I need you now; Lord I need you now."

Listen to what God says about this...

*Prov 1:24 Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,*

*Prov 1:25 Because you despised all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke,*

*Prov 1:26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes,*

*Prov 1:27 When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you.*

*Prov 1:28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.*

*Prov 1:29 Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD,*

*Prov 1:30 They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke.*

*Prov 1:31 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies.*

*Prov 1:32 For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them;*

*Prov 1:33 But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil."*

Don't let inconvenience keep you from calling on the Lord right now. Don't wait for a convenient day—don't wait for the circumstances to suit you. Do it now! Call on the Lord today! Get saved today! Join a church today! Start using your gifts today! Give the Lord your all today!

### *The Solution to Procrastination*

The solution is simply put, "*Don't put off for tomorrow what you can do today.*" Proverbs 27:1 says, "*Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*"

It happened in Saint Louis in 1984. An unemployed cleaning woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home. Since there were only a few, she made no effort to deal with them. Over the summer the bees continued to fly in and out the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned, unaware of the growing city of bees.

The whole attic became a hive, and the ceiling of the second-floor bedroom finally caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey and thousands of angry bees. While the woman escaped serious injury, she was unable to repair the damage of her accumulated neglect. *Robert T. Wenz.*

Just like in the other areas of our life where we need His help, God is willing to help us to battle procrastination. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 we find we learn the key to battling procrastination.

*2 Cor 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:*

*2 Cor 8:2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.*

*2 Cor 8:3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,*

*2 Cor 8:4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

The churches of Macedonia had much going against them. Verse 2 lets us know that they were being afflicted. The Greek word being used here literally means "a great or a severe testing of affliction."

The severe trial that the Macedonian churches experienced was of a sort that left them in a condition of *extreme poverty*. This poverty was literally a "down-to-the-depth poverty" and could also be translated, a "rock bottom" poverty. They were "dirt poor" yet amazingly, they gave.

They could have used many of the excuses for procrastination we use in the contemporary church:

*"I don't have the time" "I don't have the money" "I'm not feeling well"*

*"I'll join you on the next opportunity" "Get back with me on that."*

But Paul says that they were freely willing not only according to their ability but beyond their ability.

Think about it. How can someone give beyond their ability? The key to “beyond ability giving” is found in verses 5-7:

*2 Cor 8:5 ... they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.*

The solution to procrastination is to “first give yourself to the Lord!” When you give yourself to the Lord first, He gives you the grace to give beyond your ability. Notice the use of the word “grace” in verses 6 and 7:

*2 Cor 8:6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this **grace** in you as well.*

*2 Cor 8:7 But as you abound in everything; in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us; see that you abound in this **grace** also.*

According to Paul in these verses, the key to battling procrastination is the grace of God. The grace of God gives us the power to overcome procrastination.

A song was written sometime before 1936 by Annie Johnson Flint that communicates the truth that God will come alongside us in our weakness—He will come alongside us and strengthen us in our resolve to serve Him.

Some of us constantly fight procrastination. We know that God is not pleased with our delay. We know that God is not pleased with our putting off the important. We struggle with procrastination when it comes to the things of God. God wants you to know that His grace is sufficient!

*He Giveth More Grace*

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase,  
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,  
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,  
His power no boundary known unto men,  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

A minister was planning to preach on the text, "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"

While in his study meditating upon the subject he fell asleep and dreamed that he saw Satan and the fallen angels gathered for the purpose of devising ways and means by which they might effectively damn souls.

He said that in the dreams he saw a hellish spirit arise and say, "I will go and tell the people there is no God." But Satan said, "That will not do, for only fools deny that fact."

Then another fiend, of unusual intelligence, arose and said, "I will go and tell them that there is nothing to religion; that it is all a farce."

But Satan replied, "That will never do, for multitudes have seen followers of Jesus die, while looking into heaven, declaring that salvation was real."

One after another got up and offered suggestions, but Satan refused them all. Finally the most clever of all the demons arose and said, "I will go and tell them that there is a God; that the Bible is true; that salvation is real, but that there is plenty of time."

The minister said that in the dream he could see all were jubilant and Satan said, "Go! That is the plan." And the meeting disbanded.<sup>1</sup>

Is there plenty of time? Don't bet on it. As we have seen these last few weeks, tomorrow is not promised.

Hebrews 4:7 says, "*Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.*"

God is telling someone today, "Turn from your sins and follow Me" – Don't procrastinate. Someone is in sin today. You've been saying that you are going to stop what you are doing someday. That "someday" is today. Don't procrastinate.

A preacher once said, "*He who is almost persuaded is almost saved, and to be almost saved is to be entirely lost.*"<sup>2</sup> "*Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.*"

God is leading someone to become part of the GraceWay family – Don't put it off.

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<sup>1</sup> By William Moses Tidwell, "Effective Illustrations."

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gospelpiano.com/articles/hymn-stories-12-almost-persuaded.htm>