

Nourishing Vocation Lectionary
Phase 1: Nourishing Personal Vocational Discernment
Section 6: Reframing Regret - From Hindsight to Insight

From Psalm 51, Genesis 50:15-21, Jonah 2:1-10, 2 Samuel:12:1-14

As the saying goes, “Hindsight is 20/20.” Often, decisions that looked right (or at least appealing) at the time we made them turn out to have been wrong in ways that are abundantly clear after the fact. Yet there are times when that clarity may be a direct result of the initial bad decision; there are lessons we can only learn by messing up. Obviously, this in no way negates the effects our bad decisions may have had on others—hurting people, even when we learn from it, still requires our work to repair the damage where we can. The point, though, is that making mistakes is a core part of being human, and as long as we’re going to mess up, we should do what we can to derive insight from the experience rather than wallowing in guilt.

The reading from 2 Samuel shows David feeling both regret and insight in real time as the prophet Nathan gets him to understand the wrong he has done to Bathsheba and Uriah. Psalm 51—which is attributed to David in the wake of his lustful and unethical decision to have Uriah the Hittite killed and to have sex with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba—expresses regret for the psalmist’s actions but is also full of hope that contrition will heal the relationship between God and the psalmist. The passage from Genesis comes at forgiveness from the other direction, with the person who was wronged offering forgiveness to the people who wronged him. Joseph also demonstrates insight into the regretted actions, saying that “God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people.” The reading from Jonah demonstrates Jonah’s regret for his past actions, but also the way that this regret has brought him closer to God, similar to David in the psalm.

Together these readings call us to learn from our mistakes and to offer forgiveness where we can.