

Hard Truths – Week 10 – Don't Look Back – Bible Study Helps

Title: Don't Look Back

Sermon Summary: This sermon examines the biblical principle of not looking back, using Lot's wife as a primary example of the dangers of divided affections and partial obedience. It emphasizes that looking back can destroy what God is working to accomplish in the present. Drawing from both Old and New Testament examples, the message challenges believers to fully surrender their lives to Christ, eradicate enemies from their past (old habits, sins, temptations), and press forward with undivided devotion. The sermon warns that partial obedience is not true obedience, and that the things we fail to completely destroy in our spiritual lives will eventually return to harm us. The core message is that God's work in the present requires our full attention and surrender, not a divided heart that constantly revisits the past.

Key Points:

- Looking back can destroy what God is working to accomplish in the present
- God's mercy was leading Lot's family outward, but inwardly not all attachments were gone
- God can be moving you forward while your heart is still divided with old affections
- Looking back often reveals what has not been fully surrendered to Jesus Christ
- Some seasons of life cannot be revisited without significant harm and trouble
- Partial obedience and partial separation are not true obedience or separation
- The enemies we spare in our lives will ultimately return to destroy us
- We must honor the past and learn from it without trying to live there again
- The present is God's gift to us and requires our full devotion
- Forgetting those things which are behind means pressing forward toward Christ
- Divided loyalty to God's Word indicates areas not fully surrendered
- Rebuilding the old life undermines God's victories in our lives

Scripture Reference:

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- Genesis 19:12-26 (Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt)
- Luke 17:26-37 (Jesus says "Remember Lot's wife")
- Philippians 3:13-14 (Forgetting those things which are behind)
- Luke 9:57-62 (No man putting his hand to the plow and looking back)
- 1 Samuel 15 (Saul's partial obedience with the Amalekites)
- Exodus 16:1-3 (Israelites complaining and looking back to Egypt)
- Hebrews 11:15-16 (Abraham and Sarah not looking back)
- 1 Kings 19:19-21 (Elisha burning his plow)
- Colossians 3:1-2 (Set your affection on things above)

Stories:

- Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt for looking back at Sodom despite angelic warnings
- The children of Israel complaining in the wilderness and longing for Egypt's "flesh pots"
- Abraham and Sarah desiring a better country and not being mindful of where they came from
- Elisha burning his farming equipment (yoke and plow) to remove all return options when called to follow Elijah
- King Saul sparing Agag and the best of the Amalekites, leading to his downfall and eventual death by an Amalekite
- The Amalekite connection continuing through to Haman the Agagite in the book of Esther
- Peter returning to fishing after denying Jesus, showing a reversion to old life under pressure
- Joseph choosing not to dwell on his brothers' betrayal but focusing on God's present work
- Personal illustration about mowing lawns with straight lines - looking back causes crooked lines
- War story illustration about burning ships so soldiers had no option to retreat

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Discipleship Questions

How does Lot's wife's story challenge us to examine whether our hearts are fully surrendered to God's direction, or if we're still emotionally attached to things He's called us to leave behind?

In what ways might we be like the Israelites who longed for Egypt despite being in bondage there, romanticizing past seasons that God has already delivered us from?

What does it mean practically to 'put both hands on the plow' in your current season of life, and what distractions are most likely to make you look back?

How does Saul's partial obedience with the Amalekites illustrate the danger of sparing 'just the good parts' of sins or habits we know God wants completely removed from our lives?

Why do you think Jesus specifically said 'Remember Lot's wife' when teaching about the end times, and what does this reveal about the seriousness of divided loyalty?

What past failures, regrets, or wounds do you find yourself mentally rehearsing most often, and how might this be preventing God from using you fully in the present?

How can we honor and learn from our past without allowing it to control our present decisions and emotional state?

What would it look like in your life to 'burn the plow' like Elisha did, removing the option to return to old patterns or a former way of living?

In what areas of your life might you be saying 'I've obeyed God' while still holding onto things He's asked you to completely eliminate, similar to Saul keeping the best livestock?

How does understanding that 'the present is a gift' change the way you approach current opportunities for ministry, discipleship, and relationships that God has placed before you?

Small Group Guide: "Don't Look Back"

Based on Genesis 19 & Luke 17:32

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: What's one positive memory from your past that you're grateful for, but wouldn't want to relive that season of life? Why?

Key Scripture Passages

- Genesis 19:12-26 (Lot's wife)
 - Luke 17:26-33 (Jesus' warning: "Remember Lot's wife")
 - Philippians 3:13-14 (Forgetting what is behind)
 - Luke 9:62 (Hand to the plow)
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Main Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **God can be moving you forward while your heart is still divided with old affections**
 2. **Looking back often reveals what has not been fully surrendered to Jesus Christ**
 3. **Some seasons of life cannot be revisited without significant harm and trouble**
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Discussion Questions

Section 1: Understanding Lot's Wife (15 minutes)

1. **Why do you think Lot's wife looked back despite the clear warning from the angels?**
What does this reveal about her heart?
2. **For some, God's response might seem harsh at first glance. How does understanding God's repeated mercy and clear warnings change your perspective on this story?**
3. **Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife" in the context of His second coming. Why is this warning so important for believers today?**

Section 2: Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

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4. **What does "looking back" look like in practical terms for us today?** The sermon mentioned:
 - Rehearsing things we cannot change
 - Longing for what God brought us out of
 - Letting the past continually shape our decisions

Which of these resonates most with your experience?

5. **"What is it in your life that God is bringing to your mind?"** Take a moment of silence, then share (as comfortable): What areas of your past might be dividing your heart from full surrender to God?
6. **Read Hebrews 11:15-16.** Abraham and Sarah didn't look back because they desired something better. How can focusing on what God has ahead help us stop looking backward?

Section 3: The Danger of Partial Obedience (15 minutes)

7. **Discuss Saul's story (1 Samuel 15).** He claimed to obey God but kept the best of what he was supposed to destroy. How do we sometimes practice "partial obedience" in our spiritual lives?
8. **The sermon stated: "The very things that we spare in our life may ultimately come back to destroy us."** Can you think of examples (personal or general) where this has proven true?
9. **Elisha burned his plow and killed his oxen—removing his return options. What might "burning the plow" look like in modern Christian life?** What would it mean to remove your "return options" to old patterns?

Section 4: Moving Forward (15 minutes)

10. **The sermon said, "If we focus on the past, we're going to miss out and possibly ruin the opportunity we have in front of us."** What current opportunities or relationships might you be missing because of looking back?
11. **Read Luke 9:62.** What does it mean practically to keep both hands on the plow? What distracts you from forward-focused discipleship?
12. **The sermon ended with encouragement that God is working NOW in the present.** How can we, as a group, stay focused on what God is doing right now rather than dwelling on past seasons (even good ones)?

Practical Applications

Individual Reflection This Week:

Choose one or more of these action steps:

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1. **Identify what pulls you back.** Write down 2-3 things from your past (sins, hurts, regrets, or even "glory days") that you find yourself dwelling on. Pray specifically about surrendering these to God.
 2. **Practice "forgetting what is behind."** When you catch yourself rehearsing past failures or hurts this week, intentionally redirect your thoughts to:
 - What God is doing NOW
 - Scripture promises about your identity in Christ
 - Current opportunities to serve and love others
 3. **Evaluate partial obedience.** Ask God to show you areas where you're obeying Him partially but holding back complete surrender. What "enemies" (sins, habits, relationships) have you spared that need to be completely removed?
 4. **Burn a plow.** Take a concrete step to remove "return options" to old patterns:
 - Delete apps or accounts that tempt you
 - Have an accountability conversation
 - Make a commitment you've been avoiding
 - Forgive someone you've been holding a grudge against
 5. **Focus on the present gift.** Each day this week, write down one way you see God working in your current circumstances. Thank Him for the present rather than longing for the past.
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Group Challenge

As a group, commit to checking in with each other:

- Share one area where you're tempted to "look back"
 - Pray for each other specifically about these areas
 - Follow up next meeting: "How did God help you press forward this week?"
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Closing Reflection Questions

- What is one truth from tonight that hit home for you?
 - What is one action step you're committing to this week?
 - How can we pray for you specifically related to "not looking back"?
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Closing Prayer Focus

Pray together:

- For complete surrender to Jesus Christ

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- For grace to forget what is behind and press forward
 - For God to help us destroy the "enemies" we've been sparing
 - For focus on present opportunities and relationships
 - For faithfulness to what God is doing RIGHT NOW in our church, families, and personal lives
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Memory Verse for the Week

Philippians 3:13-14 - "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Additional Resources

- Re-read Genesis 19 and Luke 17:26-33 this week
 - Study the contrasts: Lot's wife (looked back) vs. Abraham (looked forward) vs. Joseph (learned from the past without dwelling there)
 - Journal about areas of divided loyalty in your life
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Leader Note: Be sensitive that some group members may have significant past trauma. While we should press forward, this doesn't mean ignoring the need for healing. Encourage professional Christian counseling when appropriate, and emphasize that "not looking back" means not letting the past control us, not pretending it didn't happen.

5-Day Devotional: Don't Look Back - Moving Forward in Faith

Day 1: The Danger of Divided Hearts

Reading: Genesis 19:12-26; Luke 17:32-33

Devotional: Lot's wife teaches us a sobering truth: we can be physically moving forward while our hearts remain anchored to the past. God's angels literally pulled her family from destruction, yet her affections stayed in Sodom. Jesus' command is clear: "Remember Lot's wife." What divides your heart today? Perhaps old habits, former relationships, or past hurts compete for the devotion that belongs to Christ alone. God's mercy is leading you forward into His purposes, but divided loyalty renders you unfit for kingdom work. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what still pulls you backward. True discipleship requires whole-hearted surrender, not partial obedience. Where God is moving you, let your heart follow completely.

Day 2: Forgetting What Lies Behind

Reading: Philippians 3:12-14; 1 Kings 19:19-21

Devotional: Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, understood the weight of a painful past. Yet he declared, "Forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark." Elisha demonstrated this powerfully—when called to prophetic ministry, he burned his plow and slaughtered his oxen, eliminating any option to return. What "plows" do you need to burn? Past failures, regrets, or wounds can become prisons if we constantly rehearse them. The present is God's gift to you—filled with people who need your full attention, opportunities requiring your faithfulness, and divine purposes awaiting your obedience. Stop giving yesterday more time than today. Press forward with both hands on the plow, eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.

Day 3: The Cost of Looking Back

Reading: 1 Samuel 15:1-23; 2 Samuel 1:1-16

Devotional: Saul's incomplete obedience became his downfall. Commanded to completely destroy the Amalekites, he spared what seemed good to him—including King Agag. Years later, an Amalekite killed him. The enemies we spare in our lives—besetting sins, cherished temptations, unconfessed rebellion—will eventually destroy us. Partial surrender is not surrender at all. God calls you to completely eradicate the sin that so easily entangles you. This isn't harsh; it's protective. What looks "not that bad" or "manageable" today becomes the weapon Satan uses against you tomorrow. Samuel's response was decisive—he finished what Saul refused to do. Will you be equally decisive about sin? Total victory requires total obedience. Destroy the enemy completely, or it will return to haunt you.

Day 4: Honoring the Past Without Living There

Reading: Hebrews 11:13-16; Genesis 50:15-21

Devotional: Abraham and Sarah "desired a better country, that is, an heavenly" one. They honored where they came from without longing to return. Joseph exemplified this beautifully—he remembered his brothers' betrayal but refused to let it control his present. "You meant evil," he said, "but God meant it unto good." There's wisdom in learning from history without being imprisoned by it. Your past contains lessons, not a residence. The "glory days" cannot be revisited, but God has present glory to reveal. Stop saying, "If only things were like they used to be." God is doing something new. Honor your memories, learn from your mistakes, but give your full devotion to what God is accomplishing today. The best is not behind you—it's ahead.

Day 5: Both Hands on the Plow

Reading: Luke 9:57-62; Colossians 3:1-4

Devotional: Jesus' words cut deep: "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Plowing requires forward focus—one glance backward could prove fatal. Your spiritual life demands the same intensity. Set your affection on things above, not on earthly things. What still pulls you back? Old identities? Former lifestyles? Comfortable sins? God is working in your present—people are coming, opportunities are opening, and He wants to use you fully. But distraction disqualifies. Surrender everything—not 90%, not "mostly"—everything. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Take His warnings seriously. Destroy what needs destroying. Leave what needs leaving. And press forward with holy abandon into everything God has for you today.