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Strategies for Overcoming Procrastination

Do you struggle with procrastination? Do you keep pushing that to-do list aside or put off scheduling that dentist's appointment that you know is important? What about that project at work? The deadline is slowly approaching and you tell yourself that putting off one more day won't hurt, right?

There are many ways we can avoid being productive or successful in life, but one guaranteed way just might be procrastination. Procrastination places obstacles in our path and hampers our progress. It can sabotage the fulfillment of our dreams and keep us from moving forward. Most of us admit to struggling with procrastination, but why? What is at the root of our perpetual putting off problem?

Procrastination is not something we're born with. Instead, it's a behavior we learn which can quickly become a bad habit. Procrastination can also stem from rebellion or a strong-willed nature. The good news is that we can overcome our procrastination.

Let's consider some reasons why we procrastinate:

- **The task/project seems boring, or mundane.** Examples would be doing laundry, cleaning out closets, doing yard work, dusting or unstacking the dishwasher.
- **The task/project is tedious or time consuming.** Examples would be creating a family budget, paying bills, preparing your taxes, or writing a blog post.
- **The task/project may create conflict.** Examples would be talking to your boss about a raise, breaking off a long-term relationship, or telling your spouse about that spontaneous spending spree you had at the mall this week.
- **The task/project will require disciplined effort.** Examples would be starting a diet, committing to an exercise routine, taking daily vitamins, or having a consistent quiet time.
- **Lack of self-confidence.** Examples would be giving a presentation, writing an article for a magazine contest, or applying for that new position which could be your future dream job.

- **Indecisiveness.** Examples would be choosing which college courses to take, deciding what to wear for that special occasion, or trying to figure out what to cook for dinner tonight.
- **Distractions:** Examples would be watching television, surfing the Internet, texting your friends, or talking on the phone.

After reviewing the list above, write down your top 3 reasons for procrastinating:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now, look over your new list and ask yourself, *do I allow these obstacles to pull me away from my responsibilities? Are they keeping me from accomplishing my life goals? What is really at stake when I choose to procrastinate?*

Let's consider the cost when we procrastinate:

- **We don't allow for the unexpected.** If we procrastinate on a project, we may not be taking into account, an unexpected situation that may arise and let's face it there are **always** unexpected situations that we didn't plan for.
- **Overloading our brains.** The longer we put off doing something the more our brains have to remind and re-remind us that we have something important to do. Once the task is complete, we don't have to think about it anymore. Done. Finished. Complete. Whew!
- **Guilt sets in.** If you're like me, you may start to feel guilty if you've put off doing something important. Guilt has no place in our lives and it only heaps unnecessary emotional weight on our hearts.
- **Rushing causes mistakes.** When we put off doing something until the last minute and then rush to get it all done, mistakes are bound to happen.
- **Stressed!** Procrastinating causes stress in our lives – plain and simple.
- **We suffer and those around us suffer.** When we are under pressure to finish a project that we put off until the last minute, it can cause us to be on edge and harsh with those around us. Also, putting off doctors' appointments can sometimes lead to neglect in our health.

**We may think that procrastinating will free us up for the moment and allow us more time. But in reality, it only causes problems down the road for our relationships, life goals, and personal well being.*

What does the Bible say about procrastination?

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. James 4:17 (NLT)

Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men. Colossians 3:23 (HCSB)

Slack habits and sloppy work are as bad as vandalism. Proverbs 18:9 (Message)

Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper. Proverbs 13:4 (NLT)

How can we stop procrastinating and start moving forward towards our life assignments and goals? Here are some action steps to take when the voices of procrastination are whispering in your ear:

- 1.** Stop and ask yourself, *why am I procrastinating?* Look through the list above and be honest about your answers. Then write them down on a piece of paper or index card. Now, find a verse in your Bible or online (www.biblegateway.com) that will encourage you. Write it down on the same index card keep it with you, while you're working on your task/project.
- 2.** Replace your "I don't want to" attitude with an "I am able to" attitude. Be thankful that you have the ability and power through Christ to accomplish this task/project, no matter how small or grand it is. (Philippians 4:13)
- 3.** Create a checklist and tackle the most difficult tasks first. This will boost your confidence and free you up to finish the smaller tasks as time allows in your day. Don't forget to celebrate a job well done.
- 4.** Be honest with yourself and assess how much you can realistically get done in a day. Don't attempt to do more than you can handle. You are only setting yourself up for failure.
- 5.** Focus on one task at a time - especially the ones you'd like to put off – work at it until completion. Avoid multi-tasking while working on a project that you are tempted to set aside for tomorrow.
- 6.** Break larger tasks/projects into smaller, more manageable steps. Set mini-goals along the way and reward yourself when the finished goal is reached.
- 7.** Take short breaks and relax for a few minutes when the project starts to feel overwhelming. A mini-rest will do you good.
- 8.** Enlist the help of family members, a co-worker or friend. Ask them to gently remind you if they see you procrastinating.
- 9.** Keep trying, do your best, and don't ever give up. It takes time to develop a new habit while putting away procrastination once and for all.
- 10.** Most importantly...pray and ask God to help you along the process. Pray before you start the task/project. Pray when you begin to feel stuck and need help. Pray when you're finished and thank God for all that you have accomplished through Him.

I'm convinced that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it through to completion on the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6