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Alice came to a fork in the road. 'Which road do I take?' she asked. 'Where do you want to go?' responded the Cheshire Cat. 'I don't know,' Alice answered. 'Then,' said the Cat, 'it doesn't matter'- Lewis Carroll

Exactly Alice, why bother? Why struggle with wasted time? You made mistakes, live with them. There are dreams you want to fulfill, go for it! Why spend anytime standing at the fork in the road? Does it really mean a hill of beans what has happened? Clearly, we make our own paths. Where are we going? The cat was right. "it doesn't matter." The important part is going. Go somewhere.

Do we make our own path? Well now, that is not entirely true. One of the most gut-wrenching stories I have ever read is called the *Gulag Archipelago* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. It's the story of the Russian people being subjected to the Stalin death camps. Stalin was sadistically killing his own people for no reason. There is a rumor that one man whispered something to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn while he was laying on a table dying. In a half-dazed state, Aleksandr was reminded by the man to tell the story. To survive this ordeal. Hence, the book. Was that table his fork in the road?

I bring this up because these people were just living in Russia. They were walking, working, and shopping when out of the blue they were taken. Many of them were tortured beyond belief for no reason. Stalin changed their lives without their consent. Yet, at-least one man (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn) defied the odds. For many within those death work camps awaited a cruel fate. They became lives wasted. Time wasted. Aleksandr made it time gathered. Time learned from. It was not wasted time.

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People have done me wrong. I am willing to admit I have lied, cheated, and deceived others. A few things ring loudly within my soul:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

“Do not be misled, bad company corrupts good character.”

I want to look back and fix the past. One of my greatest and worst character traits is being a finisher. I go crazy if I don't complete something. I will finish reading bad books. I finished school and completed university. However, I did not finish my first marriage. It's a quirk, but it bugs me. Am I still in love with her 20 years later? No, but it's incomplete in my mind. Some of my past is incomplete. I would love to go back and edit my life; my work as a person. Yet, I can't and I know it. As a finisher, it's like putting someone in a round room and asking them to pee in the corner.

Is it wasted time to look back and ponder different outcomes? Part of me says yes. Leave the past behind. Jesus replied, *"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* What it means is that we must look to the future more than we look at the past. This current generation is all about the victim. We're all victims. Of what? Some of the nonsense that is coming out of social media is astounding. People just want retribution for anything in the past they deem as wrong. What about the future?

It's true that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. Yet, I think Jesus was an optimist. Like Pumba said in the Lion King *“leave your behind in the past.”* It's gone. All of it is gone. They say that it takes 10 compliments to remove one harsh word. Have you talked to a woman lately? They remember every harsh word by date, time, and location. It's impossible to remove the past. Sure, I wish I could. Quite frankly, all I have is this moment forward. Pushing my plough, ahead of me. How can you fix something that is permanently gone?

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Besides, where to begin in the past? Should I have married my first wife? Am I willing to let my kids birth go? Will all the travel adventures with my youngest son become undone? If I went back and did my homework would I be married to my current wife today? This is so subjective. It's wasted time trying to pick a perfect moment (in time) to make it all right. Sometimes we just have to live and learn. To make life better from here on in. The past made us. We are the sum of its parts. I like this saying in the walking dead by Angel. She says her hearing loss is really her superpower. Use it to your advantage. Our past is our superpower. We need to learn its lessons and use it to our advantage. That is never wasted time.

However, we can get stuck in the past. Many of you have heard of the five stages of grief: anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and denial. Part of the problem with living in the past is getting stuck. Imagine being lost in denial? How about reliving an incident in anger? I am no expert but I could imagine addiction comes from being stuck in something. Is it the past, present or fear of the future? This is part of my struggle with wasted time. How much time is really being spent stuck?

Some psychologists recommend digging into your past. Others just want us to look forward to the future. I get this sinking feeling we need a little of both. Why do I fear? Those answers are in the past. Why do I love the way I do things? Those too have answers in the past. We do need past events to understand why we think and behave the way we do. Yet, it's wasted time dwelling or living there. There is little harm visiting the past, but just don't park there.

I know a storied account of a woman who was stuck in life. A doctor believed that she had mental issues because of a nagging feeling something was wrong. In counseling, she was encouraged to dig into the past. Together, they uncovered abuse when she was quite young. The issue was that the abuser was a young boy. This incident was over 20 years old. She decided to

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confront the boy (now a married man). She blasted him within the whole family circle. What was the end result? More misunderstandings and more heart break. I fear that it was less about the crime and more about being stuck.

Which is better? Dissecting the past or building a future? Yes, we need to wrestle with our demons. I do believe that. That is wrestle not annihilate. One rule of thumb in counseling is having the client find their own answers. Coming to terms with what they already know. Sometimes forgiving yourself and forgiving the other person is all you need. You can't replay the past. It's gone. However, you can understand and learn from it. Forgiveness is part of that. Don't waste all your time trying to extract payment for past sins. It will never be enough. You must move on.

Is it "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" or is it "do to others before they do unto you?" Don't struggle with the past? Don't get stuck. One of the hardest things you will ever do is try and get "unstuck." How often have I heard someone exclaim "I finally get it?" Yet, they may have spent years wallowing in one of the five griefs. It's wasted time. One of my first memories at church was hearing a woman's testimony about grief. The pastor asked her what got her through? She said "time in the desert." Sometimes we need desert life to see green pastures as beautiful. Just don't stay in the desert too long or you might get burned.

What is your focus? Realizing you were stuck is an awesome feeling. The ability to move on is a good day. Realizing it took six years is not a good day. Having a nagging issue means you are in-between something. In mental terms it's between the past and future. I know an alcoholic that cherishes writing a list of things he is grateful for every day. It has helped him look forward. He wants to move past alcohol and his regrets. Don't waste time regretting not finding the golden fleece. Instead, spend time looking forward to finding it in the future. You did live in the

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past; however, you are living in the future too. Where do you want to be spending most of your time?

I want a better future. I do not want to drag a dead body of my past into that future. How far do you think I'll get? We have to let go. Again, it is not wasted time letting go, but you must let go. I think one of the best solutions is giving yourself time to grieve or understand. Far too often we end up wasting great amounts of time trying to heal too fast. It's true! I have known several people who moved on from a long-term relationship within months. Each one of them has struggled. Several people have lost two or three new relationships. They gave themselves little chance to heal properly. How much time did they waste trying to heal through another person? Instead, they should have checked under their own hood. Made sure they understood their role in past events. I do believe that putting in that work first is shorter and not a waste of time.

I have struggled like everyone else. I seriously doubt there are many people who do not have regrets or struggles with their past. How many famous people end up fighting addiction or insecurities? Just because you can act or are a good speaker does not mean you don't struggle. One thing that they have that many of us don't is gumption. That's the ability to move forward regardless of the struggle. It's not easy, yet many famous people are successful while fighting depression, fears, and insecurities. Voyagers were French men who navigated the wild rivers of an undiscovered country in the pioneer days. There were struggles within the unknown. Yet, we owe them for not giving up in finding new lands. Do you want to discover new lands?

I feel it's all about dreaming. Successful people want their dreams to come true. You will find that most have fought their fears. They have reconciled with their past. The one thing they cherish above all else is not sitting still. They hate to waste time. How do we get the next thing?

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You know, those things we dream or never thought of? They come from the minds of the dreamers. The ones who never stop trying. Do they waste time? I don't know but I bet they don't think so. There is a story about Thomas Edison. He claimed to have tried to make a light bulb over a thousand times. What did he say about that? He reported "I know a thousand ways not to make a lightbulb." I love that. He never quit the dream.

How many people told him that he was wasting his time? Did Edison lie in bed (half the night) awake and cursing himself? Was their doubt at 569 tries? He was human and I bet there were moments of doubt. Yet, many miss the big picture here. What drives a person to waste time trying over a thousand times? It's hope, anticipation, and diligence. They were on top while doubt, depression, and anxiety were below them. We all struggle. What you do with the time given is most important. Like Rafiki said from Disney's The Lion King "You can either run from it or learn from it." Your past does define you in many ways but don't let your past define you. Reach for the stars and your dreams in the midst of tragedy and trials. Don't waste a moment.

People say "I want." They scream "I will!" Ooh, then they brood "a vow." The promises you make with yourself could cause you a ton of wasted time. In-between the past and the future are sometimes this thing called a vow.

"I vow to never be like my parents."

"I vow to never drink."

Seems simple right. Just don't do what you don't want to do. Paul in the Bible makes a great quote Romans 7:15 "*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*" We are all dummies at times.

"I knew it was too hot."

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“I knew he or she were trouble.”

It's what humans do. A vow means you will avoid something. A vow makes sure you don't know everything. I don't suggest getting drunk once. However, a recovering alcoholic knows why he does not drink. I am betting the most successful ones don't make a vow. Instead they chose to go to war with alcohol each and every day. They know what falling off the wagon feels like. They equally know what it feels like to win. If they make a vow at all it's to learn and to move forward.

I made a vow that if my high school girlfriend came back, it was forever. Several years later she did and we married. Just over eleven years after that we were divorced. That vow bugged me to this day. I do wonder how much time I wasted believing my marriage was bullet proof. That I did not have to work that much harder to keep it alive. How many ideas and opportunities did I put less importance in because I had a rock-solid vow?

That's funny, it appears I'm wallowing in the past. No, my past is a great teaching tool. I have witnessed many other vows that went up in smoke. It's wasted time trying to make life perfect. That's why there is a struggle with wasted time. We do mourn mistakes or bad outcomes. It's in how much time you mourn that's the problem. The vow is an attempt at making perfect choices in the future. What happens though, is you miss life. You can't orchestrate your life though perfect decisions to keep a vow. Life is full of attempts and mistakes sprinkled with success. Who wants to live life stressed out on keeping a vow?

All we have is time. The best path forward is to not waste time. Live life to the fullest and don't wallow. Yes, we have learned a thing or two from our past. Most people are smarter than they were ten years ago. Yet, it's human to make mistakes. It's human to repeat failures. How many of you have made the same mistake twice? I'm sure it's most of us. Just calm down, it's

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human. That's the struggle. We are enticed by far too many people to be perfect. The expectation is "don't make mistakes." People love to warn us that some dreams are an impossible goal. Everyone has made mistakes in the past but that past has passed us by. It's time to race into the future. A vow is too narrow and fear of failure is too wide. Just run a path right towards your dreams.

With that said, I hope you might avoid the struggle of wallowing too long. High expectations are fine. Goals are good. Dissecting the past is ok. Yet be pointed in a direction forward. Life has a way of diverting us from paths we need to take from time to time. There was a man who wanted to be a missionary in Africa. Yet, he was going to medical school to be a paramedic. They seemed like different worlds. One day he was asked if he was interested in being a doctor on the mission field. Some dreams take time. I'm sure he was glad he was pointed in the right direction.

Sometimes we need to embrace wasted time. What looks like wasted time to some might be good for the soul of another. Playing in the mud as a child is good for the soul. One of the best memories I had was sitting in the rain on the road with my teenage girlfriend late at night. We got soaked just sitting and talking. Yes, I should have been more concerned with my homework. Yet, I don't have homework memories. I do have rain ones.

Make great new memories. Let go of the bad ones, it's a waste of time hanging on. As humans we must push on. There is a terribly sad story in the Bible of a staff that looked like a snake. The people of Israel had disobeyed God. God asked Moses to craft a staff that had the head of a snake on it. Those who kept their eyes on the staff lived. The others perished. It's a Bible story. Yet, the real story came years into the future. The Israelites were still worshipping the

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staff. They made an idol out of it. That is exactly what the struggle with past regrets is. We are idolizing and worshiping the wrong thing for the wrong reasons.

That paramedic could have spent a ton of time wishing he was a missionary. Instead he did what he does best and his dreams unfolded in time. A kid playing in the mud will grow up. Yet, I hope he does not struggle with making a future outside the mud. Don't wish life was just simply playing in a puddle as a kid. Conversely, don't do adulting and forget to be a kid. Take life as it comes. Embrace your past memories. Always, always, hope for a bright future full of hope and dreams to fulfill.

In the Bible is a story found in Luke 15 of a wayward son. This boy was not happy in the place he was at (home). So, he took a journey to find himself. Eventually, he ended up starving while working at a pig farm. One day he realized that the pigs ate more than he did. So often we get caught up in the reunion. This boy was lost to his family. At a certain point he returned home. It's a great story of redemption. To me the lesson is not lessons learned or forgiveness. No, I feel it's simply that pigs wallow in the mud. They accept what is given. Humans were meant to strive and yearn for more.

People say "I just can't let go." How do you know if you live that way? Change the word "can't" into "won't." "You won't let go." People need to admit that they love the feeling of regret. It's a comfort place. I have heard so many people say "why try, it's impossible odds." So is inventing a lightbulb apparently. Saying you won't, puts the onus back on you. Why do that? Because only you can get out of the addicted state of loving rejection. That loving feeling of saying "I can't." Turning your words into "I won't" will change the mood. The key is changing the perspective on who the "I" is. From victim to guilty.

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You have worshiped that feeling for so long that it has become your god. In many instances we get addicted to a feeling of shame, regret, and despair. Years are wasted trying to feel the way you first did in tragedy. Why do people do it? Usually, it's because that is all we know. Misery does love company. That saying means we love feeling that way. We love feeling helpless and full of pity. How much time is wasted in a life through self-loathing and pity? Being a victim in everything is a serious epidemic these days. I fear that society is stuck too.

Here is another story. I was depressed over my divorce. I could drink, date, or cry about what happened to me. Drink to ease the pain. Date to forget. I could wallow and cry all the time. (My bad) I chose to walk and smoke. I was not a smoker. However, (that year) I spent many a wasted hour walking. I smoked the whole time. I needed that time to process. Yet, one day that was it. I didn't want grief and smoking to own me. I quit smoking but never stopped walking forward. I loved that time. It was a year that seemed wasted. I had a friend who lived in his parent's basement for eight years after his divorce. He even took his wife to court to get a 25-dollar reduction in support. 25 bucks!! He wasted a ton of time brooding over her. Brooding over the pain. He allowed it to own him. I'm betting he worships the pain. It was his badge. An eight year badge. Don't waste time like that. We only have so much on this earth. Don't waste time. So, I walked for a year (working it out), big deal. Just don't struggle for eight years!

It can't end this way. Why struggle every single day for years. There is another story in the Bible of a man who needed healing. He bought the lie that he could not get into the healing pool by himself. Thirty-eight years later Jesus comes along and heals him. Thirty-eight years! People tend to focus on Jesus healing him. I'm focused on the thirty-eight years. That is a ton of wasted time believing you can't. It takes one second to change your can't into a won't. That

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realization is massive. What could have been accomplished in 37 years, 23 hours, 59 minutes, and 59 seconds if you forced yourself to get in the dam pool?

There needs to be a struggle between the distant past and the distant future. Each one of us needs to let go of worshiping the past. Don't ignore it but you need to move on. Yet, the struggle is hard. It's like moving in mud. One step at a time. We need a thousand tries. We need a purpose and goal. To make time productive there needs to be steps and goals. Today I will do this. Tomorrow I will do that. It begins with seven days of mourning. Then it should turn into six, five, four, three, two one, and none. What does that struggle accomplish? Wasted time? No, it's the greatest feeling ever when time in the desert turns into time in the tropics. There is a big difference between struggling with and struggling through. Which way are you pointed?

I had never been to Hawaii. For years I picked up a friend at the airport who went several times. At the beginning of my second marriage I had to go. It's my fault that I just existed in my first marriage. We never really went anywhere. No wonder we split up. Where were the positive markers? That was not going to happen in my new marriage. We were going to live life to the fullest. I can remember the euphoria as I sat on Waikiki beach looking at Diamondhead crater in the warm sun. I had beat my past feelings. It was so cool to move on and fulfil dreams. Since that time, I have stood at the pyramids, swam in the dead sea and red sea. Stood on the top of Mt. Saini (Gods mountain) in Egypt. Traveled to Jamaica, been on a cruise, and graduated from university. I have done all that after thirty-three years old and divorce. I refuse to waste time worshiping the past.

Does that make me special? Does that make me strong? Am I better than most? No! I struggle. I have wasted time. Actually, I'm not a whole lot different than that lady at church. I have spent time in the desert. The difference is that I refused to stay there. For five years I

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(mostly) did not date. Instead I took the time to check under my own hood. Who am I? What do I like? I worked hard on becoming a better spouse before I had one. It was not wasted time. Am I perfected now? No, but I'm better than I was all those years ago. I have learned.

I just don't want you to struggle too much. Don't create wasted time worshipping your past. Don't let those feelings become the norm. Happy people are happy because they love the feeling of being happy. It's not fake if you love being happy. Did you know that feeling happy takes work? If all you know is sadness then happy is foreign to you. It takes time to love being happy. Yet, the Chinese proverb says "a thousand-mile journey begins with one step." It's not rocket science. One step!

We do create wasted time. Sometimes it is created for us. People who live in misery want company. They will tear you down so you feel like they do. Others will bring you down so they don't have to feel below you. People are people. It's like a human pastime to live in misery. We know what happy people look like yet, we despise them too. It's your choice. Which crowd will you run with? It's either worship your past and carry around the dead weight or live for a great future. A future filled with mistakes, triumphs, and success. That's why I think God is unknown or invisible. People believe that means he does not exist. We can see the past, yet, we cannot see the future either. Would you rather worship what you have seen or what is unseen in the future? What will you waste your time doing? What will you allow yourself to struggle with, and for how long?

A struggle is before you. Is it "I can't" or "I won't." Wasted time is either created by circumstances or our own mistakes. Yet, either way, we have a choice in how we treat them. Imagine putting mistakes in a pig pen. How long with you starve while trying to feast on them? Events happen that cause us trouble like the early death of a parent. Imagine watching others get

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past it while you feast on the past. How long you struggle is based on how long you are willing to struggle. People that (get past it) are those who stand up and head home. They realize in that moment that the struggle is not worth starving for. Are you hungry for a better life?