



What Do You Do About Procrastination? Do You Struggle with Procrastination?

When I was in graduate school and beginning work on my doctorate, Mary Jo and I lived in seminary apartments dedicated to married students, primarily those in doctoral programs. I was excited about getting going on my degree and although I was working full-time in the field of psychology, I was determined to finish as soon as possible. I soon discovered though that the majority of students who begin doctoral work never complete it. That was astounding to me as it seemed absurd to spend so much time and make so many sacrifices to not finish the work. What grounded most who didn't end up graduating was the dissertation. They just didn't finish it. We were given ten years total to complete the seminars and gain faculty approval of our dissertations and the vast majority never got done in time. They kept putting off the writing year after year until it was too late. Some were granted extensions and still could not finish...or did not finish. The grind of writing is wearing on you psychologically and having to constantly say "no" to requests for your time, especially from family members or church leaders is tough. It is much easier just to put off the work when something which seems more urgent or fun to do is presented to you. It was not a lack of intelligence or creativity that got in the way of so many trying to earn their doctorate. It was the devious intrigues of procrastination.

We all are tempted to procrastinate, especially when the task is unpleasant. When procrastination becomes a part of your lifestyle, it can be hard on you. Studies show that students who procrastinate get lower grades and workers who procrastinate produce lower quality work. Habitual procrastination can lead to insomnia and gastro-intestinal disturbances. Procrastination often damages personal and professional relationships. Who hasn't procrastinated on making needed dental or medical appointments, correcting someone's bad behavior, or making needed changes in one's lifestyle? Procrastination keeps you from getting exercise, eating healthier, reading your Bible, developing a productive prayer life, eliminating sinful behaviors, finishing paperwork, applying for jobs, eliminating clutter, keeping friendships alive, improving relationships and mental health. Procrastination is the roadblock to success, happiness, and peace of mind.

If you have read the Bible, you probably wondered why Israel chose a lifetime in the blistering heat of the Sinai desert rather than enjoying a happy life in the promised land. Spies sent into the land brought back a discouraging report of what they found in the territory God was sending them. Ten of the twelve spies it seemed the people living there were too powerful to defeat, and they would get massacred if they tried. **All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"** (Numbers 14: 2-3 NIV) Granted, this was procrastination at the highest levels but this rebellion against God rests on the fundamental pillars of procrastination. 1. This is too hard to do now. 2. I don't want to do it now. 3. I have a better option than doing this. 4. I don't see why it is so necessary to finish this.

It doesn't seem to matter how great the risk to you is if you put off what needs to be done when you decide to procrastinate. Something internal blocks the ability to grasp what harm you may be causing yourself or others. Consider ancient Lot! When two angels came to lead him and his family out of Sodom because God was about to destroy the city and all the surrounding towns, the nephew of Abraham hesitated. We

don't know why he tried to put the escape on pause. Perhaps he was reluctant to leave behind his home and wealth. It could have been that he wanted some more time to try and convince the two men betrothed to his daughters to leave with them. Maybe he was just tired and wanted to get some more sleep. Whatever the reason, Lot procrastinated. **With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.** (Genesis 19: 15-16 NIV) If it were not for the angels forcing Lot to leave, he and his daughters would have been incinerated. Procrastination always carries a risk/reward with it. For Lot, there was the risk of being burnt to a crisp, but the reward was the possibility that the angels were joking and he could comfortably remain in his home. Risk/reward is the foundation of procrastination and whether it is considered logically or carefully is up for grabs. Always risk/reward either consciously or unconsciously factors into procrastination.

The ultimate example of procrastination found in the Bible and perhaps its most crucial test is found in Matthew when Jesus told the story of the ten virgins. **"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.** (Matthew 25:1-4 NIV) When the groom finally arrived, the five virgins didn't have any oil to light their lamps and so in a frantic effort to be able to be a part of the wedding, they took off to buy some from oil venders. When they got back, the wedding feast had already begun, and they were refused entrance. The parable of course had much deeper implications than mere procrastination, but procrastination was at the heart of it. For some reason, five of the virgins did not in advance purchase enough oil for their part in bringing light to the wedding celebration. They procrastinated and it cost them dearly. Jesus makes this much clear. Salvation and eternal life cannot be risked at any cost. Don't wait until the judgment day when the books are closed on your life. Make sure now you have put your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life. Have your sins forgiven by right now believing Jesus Christ died on the cross to take them away from you and be ready to meet God. Don't put this off today. You do not know when God will close this life for you and bring you to your eternal destination. Prepare now for eternity by putting your faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation!

The problem with procrastination is you never really know the cost of it. There may be something around the corner that if you procrastinate now the outcome could be devastating. For the foolish virgins it was the loss of the wedding feast. For the Israelites it was death in the desert rather than life in the promised land. For Lot, it was the destruction of his family. What could be around the corner for you if you procrastinate? Here are some sound critical strategies to follow to rise above procrastination. 1. Pray for Christ to be in charge of each decision you make. Give Him permission to take whatever means is required to keep you on the right path and do what is best. 2. Make yourself accountable to someone you trust. For Lot, it turned out to be the angels. When he started to hesitate, the angel had the fortitude and unbending resolve to keep Lot from wrecking himself. If there is something you need to do, ask someone to push you to get it finished. 3. Build the skillset of shaking off procrastination by doing lower intensity, smallish tasks. Develop the habit of doing what needs to be done as soon as you can rather than putting it off. Ask God to empower you when you feel the tug to procrastinate. 4. Celebrate with upgraded rewards for doing what you want to avoid. Whatever would put some happiness in your heart for getting jobs done you don't want to start or finish will do the trick. Aren't you thankful Jesus, as He paused in the Garden of Gethsemane to be with the Father, did not procrastinate but instead did the work of salvation, dying on the Cross when His body and His mind screamed "stop"? Tomorrow is a curse and a blessing. Tomorrow is the excuse of the procrastinator. Tomorrow I will get started. Tomorrow I will get this done. It is also the joy of the one who gets going and does not avoid what needs to be done. Tomorrow I will enjoy the fruit of my labor. Tomorrow I will gain the reward for what I have finished. Decide what sort of tomorrow you want. The tomorrow of dreading a work you put off or the tomorrow with happiness for a job well-done.