

How God Heals Life's Disappointments

You See Your Failure, God Sees Your Future



RECLAIM REGRET



KATHRYN J. HERMES, FSP

Author of the international bestseller, *Surviving Depression*

Praise for *Reclaim Regret*

“If you are burdened with regret and feel that you must live with the pain, this is the book for you. Sr. Kathryn will show you a path toward healing.”

—Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, author of *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living*

“Some books are to be read, others savored. This book offers us a banquet of scriptural truths and transformative experiences leading readers to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. It illuminates in personal and practical ways the paradoxical reality that in every limit there is a blessing in disguise, that in every regret there is a reason for hope.”

—Susan Muto, PhD, Dean of Epiphany Academy
of Formative Spirituality

“This practical, hope-filled book is beautifully written and full of wisdom gleaned from years of personal experience and ministry. In *Reclaim Regret* Sr. Kathryn serves as a trustworthy guide, leading you first into the heart of God and then into your own heart. I encourage you to read this book with an open heart and then enter into the healing

meditations that make up the second part of the book. As you do, you will engage in a process of deep soul healing, releasing the regrets and disappointments that have prevented you from living the fullness of joy that Jesus promises.”

—Bob Schuchts, founder of John Paul II Healing Center, Tallahassee, Florida, and author of *Be Healed: A Guide to Encountering the Powerful Love of Jesus in Your Life*

“With utter confidence in God’s abiding love, Sr. Kathryn deftly guides her readers on a healing journey, transforming regrets into life-giving possibilities.”

—Mark Neilsen, writer and former editor of *Living Faith: Daily Catholic Devotions*

“Words don’t change hearts; grace does. But these words of Sr. Hermes facilitate grace in a powerful way. With great insight, she has tapped into what wounds the human heart, and she shows, as if by intimate knowledge, the ways of a Loving Father who desires to heal. Read these words, practice the exercises, and let your heart be healed.”

—Dr. Gregory Bottaro, director of the CatholicPsych Institute, and author of *The Mindful Catholic: Finding God One Moment at a Time*

“The best of contemporary spiritual and psychological wisdom, this accessible and powerfully experiential book will heal not only you, but your relationships as well. If I had one gift to bequeath my children, it would be to reclaim regret.”

—Denise DeSesa-Smith, PhD, Licensed Psychologist

“A beautiful, inspirational guide with universal appeal, teaching us how to live with and accept our regrets, and then move on, feeling our burdens have been lifted . . .”

—Fred Silverstone, Psychotherapist and
Licensed Mental Health Counselor

“In *Reclaim Regret*, Sr. Kathryn weaves Scripture, regrets, and prayer into heart-transforming experiences, using an authentic, clear, and compassionate style of writing. My journey of repentance, transformation, and living a new life in Christ has been supported and enhanced one hundredfold.”

—Mary Celine Weidenbenner, OSU, teacher at
Mary Carrico Catholic School in Knottsville, Kentucky

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By Kathryn J. Hermes, FSP



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Foreword

You might be wondering about the meaning of this book's stunning cover and the beautifully repaired piece of pottery on it that has no doubt caught your eye. *Kintsugi* is the Japanese art of repairing ceramic with lacquer mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. The bright golden lines visibly incorporate the repair into the piece emphasizing newness. Rather than disguising the brokenness, the radiant repairs help us to see the breakage as part of the history and beauty of the pottery that has been made whole again.

Reclaim Regret speaks to the brokenness that all of us experience at one time or another because of unresolved regrets. But, it's much more than that. This book provides a way to reflect on our hurts and to heal from them. Most of us, at some point, feel stuck in our lives due to past experiences. We might fear moving forward or we might believe that moving past something is impossible. Yet, we often can't *quite* figure out what is wrong, why we feel this way, and why our attempts to feel happy and to move forward have continued to fail.

The process of healing from regret is even further complicated by the fact that most of us are very busy. We are unable to take the

time to reflect on our past because we are up to our elbows in unending projects and mired in a constant effort to check off endless to-do lists. We feel the need to keep up, and we are just too busy to take the time to examine the problem. I would even venture to say that some of us operate in this kind of survival mode for many years, perhaps because we are purposefully trying to forget something painful, or more specifically, our haunting regrets.

We attempt to get by, to survive by maintaining the hectic, numbing pace of our lives. But while we are keeping so busy, suddenly something happens that makes us take stock of our lives. As the author, Sr. Kathryn Hermes, puts it in the introduction: “Something happens. You are stopped in your tracks.” She lists a myriad of scenarios that can cause this to occur and explains, “As you absorb the pain of what is happening, the important things begin to surface.” That’s when the “could haves” and “should haves” begin to spin around in our brains. As we begin to grapple with the weight and reality of our regrets, we might be surprised by sudden agonizing pain. We might not know where to turn and feel so overwhelmed that we try to stuff the uncomfortable feelings back down inside to deal with at another time—or possibly never.

However, to find a healthy balance in our lives, we all must face our regrets with God’s help at some point. Every single one of us experiences regret. As Sr. Kathryn points out, “Regret comes in all shapes and sizes.” When we feel overcome by regret, we might ask ourselves some of the following questions: “What can I do with all of the new questions that have surfaced as a result of a traumatic event?” or “What can I do when I am jolted by an event that forces me to reflect upon the evocative past?” or “What can I do with the self doubt and the thoughts that haunt me?” And most importantly, “What role can my faith play in this process of healing from my regret?”

I know without a doubt that faith has played an indispensable role in my life. I wrote about my crooked path in my spiritual memoir *The Kiss of Jesus: How Mother Teresa and the Saints Helped Me to Discover the Beauty of the Cross* (Ignatius Press). When I encountered difficulties, abuse, and uncertainties in my life, the beautiful virtue of faith kept me moving forward—one step at a time. I have learned from personal experience that we are meant to turn to the virtues of faith, hope, and love when we experience pain and regret. The theological virtues are like muscles that need to be flexed and nourished. When we face regret, we need to pray for an increase in these virtues because we need God’s help to heal.

Sr. Kathryn skillfully shows us how to enter into this healing process with courage. She also reminds us that healing from our regrets is the same as entering into “the amazing mystery of God’s love.” In *Reclaim Regret*, Sr. Kathryn takes us gently by the hand and helps us through the steps of healing so that we might experience God’s beautiful promise of newness. Through modern-day stories, Scripture, Church teaching, and concrete exercises, this book leads readers through a process that will end in the discovery of great hope in the midst of sometimes agonizing regrets. With the help of Sr. Kathryn’s astute insights and God’s healing grace, all your painful mistakes, abuse, or hurts can be transformed. With God’s help, *Reclaim Regret* can help us all to embrace our own unique lives and to be at peace.

DONNA-MARIE COOPER O’BOYLE

author and EWTN TV host

Acknowledgments

I want to express my gratitude to God, who has allowed me to walk with many different people along the path of finding hope in the midst of regrets. For those who have entrusted me with their hearts' work, I thank you. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Sr. Maria Grace Dateno, FSP, for believing in this project; and to Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP, who had the vision and editorial skill to bring it to life.

The stories in this book have been inspired by the people who have entrusted some of their darkest memories and regrets to me over the years. Their stories have been blended together and names are changed for the sake of privacy.

Introduction

You are busy. Life happens. You can barely keep up. You know that you could be thinking about or doing more important things, but you don't have the time to stop and consider what they would be, much less do them.

And then something happens. You are stopped in your tracks. A spouse leaves. A friend dies. A job is lost. Opportunities pass you by. A child makes decisions that break your heart. As you absorb the pain of what is happening, the important things begin to surface. What was hidden suddenly seems so obvious. The knowledge of what you could have done, should have done, for years perhaps, or years ago, leaves you feeling profoundly empty, or guilty, or depressed.

If only you could do things over again . . .

Regrets come in all shapes and sizes. Navigating the questions, self-doubt, and haunting what-ifs of your life can be difficult. Facing how your regrets may have turned you into a person you never wanted to be is even more difficult. Yet no one escapes this part of life. It's the nightfall between yesterday and tomorrow, between the past and the future, between sunset and the coming dawn.

You may feel bad about something in your life that has happened to you or someone you love. You may be blaming yourself for a number of things. Perhaps you have given up hope that you will ever be able to retrieve what you have lost in life or fix what has been broken. A woman once shared with me that she still wonders what she did wrong after her marriage ended in divorce over twenty years ago. To this day, she wishes she could go to bed and never wake up. She is not alone in her suffering.

Through a program I designed called HeartWork, I have worked one-on-one with many people haunted by regrets. The people I have worked with often believe that if they had *just one more chance* things would be different, but they also feel that there are no more chances. But God always offers more chances. And this book provides you with the chance to return to explore what you regret in order to discover a new outcome.

This may seem impossible, but we have an amazing example of this right in the Scriptures. In the familiar story of Moses in the Book of Exodus, we read about an Israelite boy born in Egypt who was miraculously saved from slaughter by Pharaoh's daughter. Raised in Pharaoh's courts, Moses was expected to rise to power. But when he intervened on behalf of a kinsman and murdered an Egyptian, Moses became a fugitive. He fled Egypt to Midian where he met and married his wife, Zipporah. The man who once had been accustomed to the wealth of Pharaoh's household began tending his father-in-law flocks.

One day, as Moses was herding his sheep in the wilderness, he noticed a bush on fire but not burning up. As he moved closer to the curious sight, the Lord spoke to him, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:4–5). The Lord then told Moses to return to Egypt to rescue the Israelites from

oppression. Moses, however, was in no hurry to go back to Egypt. Most likely, he had already spent many long years reflecting on what had gone wrong. Perhaps he asked himself if he had already thwarted God's plan. He must have struggled with many regrets, what-ifs, and self-doubts.

But while Moses' face looked to the past, God's face looked to the future. When the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush, he could have pointed out Moses' mistakes in Egypt. Instead, God did not talk about the past. He already knew that Moses was well aware of his mistakes. So he told Moses he was sending him back to Egypt with a message for Pharaoh. The Lord was revealing a future to Moses that would pass right through the center of what he most feared. In some mysterious way, on that day before the burning bush, Moses received back all he thought he had lost.

You too are standing on holy ground. This book invites you to take off your sandals for a while and experience holy ground—*your* holy ground!

I have had the privilege of working extensively with people struggling with broken hearts and guilt over the things that have happened in their lives—things done *to* them and things done *by* them. I often share with them what I have learned in my own struggle with regrets, and my experience walking through my regrets often helps them to find hope.

You have not made this journey yet, so you may have trouble believing that a light shines on the other side of the darkness of regret. But I can tell you from experience that it does. God wants to heal your heart and bring you into the light of his love.

God makes four promises to the person haunted with regrets:

- *First Promise:* I want to throw you a party.
- *Second Promise:* Look at me, and you will know who you are.

- *Third Promise:* You see your failure, I see your future.
- *Fourth Promise:* My light will radiate from you for all the world to see.

These promises that begin each part in Book One are deeply rooted in Scripture and offer a concrete framework for healing. Book One will provide you with different tools to help you face your regrets, bring them to God, and find healing. The promises are not based on my human abilities as an author and spiritual counselor, but on God's divine abilities, on God, who heals life's disappointments.

Presented along with God's promises are skills that you can learn to attain personal development and spiritual growth. Each of these skills will help you to reclaim your regret in the light of God's love so that new life can blossom.

Some of the skills you will learn are to:

- uncover destructive patterns in your life;
- free yourself from the memories and fears that plague you;
- get in touch with your pain and embrace your life as it really is;
- stop building your life around your regrets;
- hold the memories of all you regret with reverence;
- learn how to entrust the *mystery* of your future to the Lord.

After gaining the tools and skills in Book One, and meditating on God's never-ending love for you, Book Two invites you to continue to bring to prayer all of your regrets and struggles through meditations. The meditations are general enough to help anyone struggling with regrets but specific enough that you will find help for all that haunts you.

Rest assured that following the course of action in this book will help you to discover that your regrets are holy ground—*your* holy ground!

So, come with me on a journey *into* yourself. Movement, change, shadows, discoveries—you will find all of these things as you go. This book will take you through forgotten memories and into unfamiliar emotional territory. Welcome and attend to everything that comes up along the way. There is no “wrong” emotion to feel in this process. Embrace whatever comes up and surrender it to Jesus. At some points you may feel more burdened than you did before, but trust that this journey will ultimately lead to more clarity, lighten your load, and bless you.

Your regrets are holy ground—
your holy ground!

A piece of advice. Simply reading this book will not lead you to healing. You can't make a trip somewhere by just reading about it. Spiritual journeys are not logical expositions. They are messy things of the heart. This journey through your regrets to peace will be like going up a mountain. Just as mountain roads don't lead straight to the top but circle around to the summit gradually, in the same way, the material in this book will lead you on a gentle,

gradual, cyclical journey. This book presents the same kind of material in each section, but each time with a new twist and with deeper spiritual lessons. Also, when you get to Book Two, you may feel tempted to skip over it or read quickly through it. Resist the temptation! The most important parts of this book are the prayers and exercises in Books One and Two that will help you to encounter God. I urge you to give them the time they—and you—deserve. Bringing this process to prayer will absolutely be key to your healing process.

Finally, dear reader, have courage! Journeys often involve detours, surprises, new information, rest stops, traffic jams, and unexpected experiences. In fact, so you can't take logical control of the journey, surprises and unexpected experiences are built into this book. But I promise, if you put yourself into the meditations and stories and take time with each exercise, you *will* discover the incredible beauty of God's promises to all of us human beings. We are flawed, yes, but oh so incredibly loved!