

**“Letting Go of Regret”**  
**Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, February 1, 2026**

**Inspiration: Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s wisdom and words inspire today’s service topic:

“Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities have crept in; forget them as soon as you can.”

Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. Regret has no place in the life you are building for yourself – let go of that dead weight and lose the chains of the past.

**Sermon: “Letting Go of Regret”**  
**by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels**  
Remember to SLOW DOWN

Good morning, beloveds. I am honored to be with you again today, on the cusp of a new month, in a very new calendar year, in the presence of people who know the importance of keeping up the good fight while letting go of any regret we might feel for not being able to do Every. Single. Thing. That needs to be done at this time, in our world.

**WHAT — Naming regret honestly, without letting it rule us**

There’s something about winter that invites reflection. The days are shorter. The light is thinner. Roads turn slick. Schedules shift.

Storms interrupt what we planned, and suddenly we are reminded—sometimes gently, sometimes abruptly—that we are not fully in control.

Winter asks us to slow down, to pay attention, to walk with care. And when we're slowed down, old thoughts have a way of catching up with us.

Regret often comes in like that. Not like a dramatic entrance, but like a quiet tapping on the inside of the mind:

Remember this?

Remember what you said?

Remember what you *didn't* do?

Remember the moment you wish you could rewrite, rewind, do over?

Regret can show up when we're alone in the car. It can show up in the middle of the night. It can show up when we're scrolling the news and feeling the heaviness of what is happening in the world—violence, cruelty, intimidation, suffering—and we find ourselves turning that heaviness inward.

What if I had done more? What if I had spoken sooner? What if I had been braver, clearer, better prepared?

If any of that is familiar, I want you to know something right up front: regret is not proof that you're a bad person. Regret is often proof that you have a conscience. It can be a sign that your values are alive. It can mean you care—about others, about justice, about integrity, about love.

But regret can also become a weight. A chain. A way of punishing ourselves. And that's where it stops being useful.

So today we're naming the thing itself: regret—the painful awareness of what we wish we had done differently.

Regret about actions we took.

Regret about actions we didn't take.

Regret about words that landed wrong.

Regret about silence.  
Regret about timing.

Sometimes the regret is small. A missed opportunity. A sharp comment. A choice that didn't match our best self.

Sometimes regret is larger, and it carries real grief: the relationship that ended badly, the season we lost to survival mode, the moment we weren't present when we wish we had been.

And sometimes regret is collective. We look at the world and think, How did we get here? Why didn't we stop this sooner? What do we do now?

Regret, in and of itself, is not the enemy. The question is what we do with it. Because regret can go two very different directions.

One direction leads toward learning, repair, and growth.  
The other direction leads toward rumination, shame, and stuckness.

Our sermon today is about choosing the first path: learning and release. Not denial. Not pretending. Not "positive vibes only." But a real spiritual practice of letting go—so we do not carry regret into a new month, a new year, or a new chapter of our lives.

### **SO WHAT — Why carrying regret forward costs us more than it gives**

So why does this matter—beyond personal comfort? Because regret that becomes shame does not make us more moral. It makes us less available.

Less available to our families.  
Less available to our community.  
Less available to the work of justice.

Less available to joy.

The past is the past, and living on regret uses up energy unnecessarily. It can become a source of stress, and in extreme cases, it can lead to harmful coping—because the mind keeps replaying what cannot be changed.

### **Do You Live on Regrets?**

That matters spiritually, because chronic regret can quietly distort our relationship with ourselves.

We start to believe we are defined by our worst moments or our least courageous seasons.

We confuse “learning” with “punishment.”

We confuse “accountability” with “self-contempt.”

And it matters communally, because in times like these—when the news cycle can be relentless, when violence and intimidation show up in public life, when we see cruelty expressed toward people who are standing up for what they believe in—many people are already exhausted.

They are already carrying fear.

They are already carrying grief.

If we add self-beating to that mix, it doesn't create better citizens. It creates burnt-out ones.

Here's a hard truth: shame is not sustainable fuel for justice. Shame might get you moving for a moment—like panic might get you out of a burning building—but shame will not keep you steady for the long haul.

Shame corrodes. It isolates. It tells you that you are not worthy of contributing. It whispers, “Who do you think you are? You messed up before. You'll mess up again. Stay small.”

But our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us into something tougher, something sturdier, something stronger than that.

Our shared value of Transformation tells us that growth is real. Not instant. Not perfect. But real.

Our shared value of Interdependence reminds us we were never meant to carry the world alone. If you feel regret because you couldn't do everything—good. That means you recognize you are human. And because you are human, you need community. You need companions. You need rest and repair. You need shared labor.

Our shared value of Equity invites us to recognize that not everyone has the same access to safety, time, money, or power. Some people face consequences and risks that others do not.

This matters when we judge ourselves. And it matters when we judge each other. If we're not careful, regret can turn into harshness—toward ourselves and toward others.

Equity calls us to compassion that is not sentimental but informed. And our shared value of Justice asks us to keep showing up—again and again—not because we are flawless, but because the work is necessary.

At the center of all of it is Love—not as softness, but as spiritual courage. Love that says: You are still worthy. You are still needed. You can begin again.

This is where Emerson offers a bracing kind of mercy: “Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities have crept in; forget them as soon as you can.”

This is not permission to stop caring. It's permission to stop punishing.

It's Emerson reminding us that the past is not a courtroom where we must argue our case forever. It's a classroom—and at some point, class ends, and we walk out with what we've learned.

Here's an important point: one reason self-acceptance is so difficult is that the hardest person to forgive is often ourselves. Regret, shame, and guilt can keep us trapped. Instead of reflecting and learning, we dwell, ruminate, replay the situations over and over again in our minds.

### **3 Strategies to Let Go of Past Regrets and missteps...**

And dwelling, ruminating, replaying has a cost.

- It steals our present.
- It shrinks our future.
- It drains our courage.

Here are several realities that touch nearly everyone: loss, rejection, career change, relationships ending, health issues, failure, and the lifelong challenge of figuring out who we are.

If that list doesn't humble us, I don't know what will. Because it means regret is not just a personal defect. It's a predictable human response to living a complicated life.

The question is not "How do I avoid being human?"

The question is "How do I respond to my humanity with wisdom?"

And this is where confidence matters.

Confidence can be described as an inner belief—born of self-awareness and experience—that you can handle what comes your way. Not cockiness. Not denial. A grounded sense of capacity.

When regret becomes shame, confidence collapses.  
We forget our resilience.  
We forget our past successes.  
We forget that we have grown since the moment we regret.

We start telling ourselves a story that ends too soon: I failed. Therefore, I am a failure. But transformation says: I learned. Therefore, I continue.

In this moment—when the news can make people feel powerless, when fear can tempt us toward numbness—letting go of regret is not a small, self-help task. It is a spiritual and civic act. It frees energy. It restores capacity. It helps us remain grounded enough to keep loving and keep acting.

Winter weather can weigh on the body. Regret can weigh on the spirit. But neither has the final word—unless we decide it does.

## **NOW WHAT — Practices for letting go of regret without letting go of responsibility**

So what do we do? Not as a resolution, we break by February. Not as a guilt project. But as a practice we return to—especially when the world feels heavy.

Here are three main practices, with a few concrete steps inside each.

### **1) Tell the truth, without dramatizing it**

The first strategy is simple and powerful: be honest with yourself and hold yourself accountable. Identify what you did or didn't do. Own it without excuses—and without self-hatred. This is the difference between accountability and shame.

Accountability says:

“Yes, that happened. Yes, I contributed to it. Yes, I can learn, and not repeat that occurrence.”

Shame says:

“I am bad. I ruin things. I don’t deserve to move forward.”

Shame is not truth-telling. Shame is a verdict.

So choose truth-telling instead. If it helps, try this simple journaling prompt (and you can do this in five minutes, not fifty):

- What happened? (facts, not a story)
- What was I feeling then? What am I feeling now?
- What value was I trying to honor—or what value did I lose track of?
- What did I learn?

That last question is crucial. Learning is the hinge that turns regret into wisdom.

## **2) Make amends where you can—and then release the rest**

The second strategy in the resource is also clear: try to remedy the situation and make amends where possible. Even if time has passed, an apology can be healing. If you can’t make direct amends, do good deeds as a way of aligning your life with your values.

This matters because regret often lingers when there is unfinished business—especially relational unfinished business. If you owe someone an apology and it is safe and appropriate to offer it, consider doing so. Not to get a gold star, not to be perfect, but to free both of you from the emotional residue.

And if you cannot make amends—because the person is gone, or unreachable, or contact would cause harm—then choose what the resource suggests: let your life become your apology.

- Do one act of kindness.
- Offer one gesture of repair in the world.

- Support one cause aligned with your values.
- Speak one truth you've been afraid to speak.
- This is not performative. This is how we break chains.

Because here's the thing: regret tries to convince us we are stuck. Repair proves we are not.

### **3) Strengthen confidence by returning to the present and taking the next right step**

One of the most practical ways to beat your “fear of change” is to stay in the present. It notes how easy it is to get caught in regrets about the past or worries about the future—and how grounding ourselves in the present moment helps us meet fear.

That is deeply UU-friendly wisdom. The present moment is where our agency lives. You cannot change what happened. You can change what happens next.

So here are a few “next right steps” to practice when regret resurfaces:

- Breathe and name it: “This is regret.” (Just naming it reduces its power.)
- Speak to yourself as you would speak to someone you love: Negative self-talk erodes confidence.

Take one small action: break the change down into smaller steps.

Remember a past success: recall where you've grown and what you've handled before. And if the regret is tied to justice work—if you feel guilt that you didn't do more—then let that guilt become information, not condemnation.

Ask: What is one sustainable thing I can do this week?  
What is one way I can show up with others?

What is one action that aligns with my values and my capacity?

Justice requires endurance. Endurance requires self-compassion.

A winter-related practice: Don't let the storm write your story!

Let me say this plainly, because winter makes it obvious: storms happen.

- Some storms are literal—snow, ice, power outages, plans that have to be changed.
- Some storms are social—angry rhetoric, public intimidation, violence, fear.
- Some storms are internal—old grief, regret, fatigue.

We do not control the storm. But we can refuse to let it define us.

- You can be delayed without being defeated.
- You can be shaken without being broken.
- You can be disappointed without being destroyed.

This is the strength I want you to carry into a new month and a new year: not the brittle strength that pretends you're fine, but the resilient strength that says, "I can keep going, and I can do it with integrity." And this is where Emerson returns as a spiritual charge: finish the day, learn what you can, and be done with it.

Not because nothing matters. But because what matters most is that you keep living—awake and unburdened enough to love and act again.

## **Closing: Breaking the chains**

If regret is a chain, then forgiveness is not a sentimental feeling—it is a decision to stop dragging the past behind you.

- You do not have to carry yesterday into tomorrow.
- You do not have to bring last year’s harshest self-judgment into a new year.
- You do not have to stay locked in a moment you would not choose again.

Let regret teach you—then let it go. And when the world is loud with negativity, when headlines feel designed to wear us down, let your life answer back—not with despair, but with steady commitment:

- I will keep loving.
- I will keep showing up.
- I will keep choosing justice.
- I will keep beginning again.

Because you are **not** your worst moment, your most tired season, the story that regret tells.

You are a person still becoming. And you are not becoming alone.

Amen, and blessed be.

## **Closing Blessing –**

May you leave this place lighter than you arrived.  
May you release the regrets that no longer teach you  
and carry forward only the wisdom they revealed.

May the turning of the season remind you  
That rest is not failure,  
That reflection is not retreat,  
And that letting go is an act of courage.

May you trust your strength —  
Not the loud, brittle kind,  
But the quiet strength that endures,  
Adapts and returns again and again to what matters most.

Go in peace, not burdened by what has been,  
But grounded in who you are becoming.

Amen, Ase, and Blessed Be.