

FULL SERMON

STILL LOOKING BACK? COUNT THE COST.

“What Has Looking Back Cost You?”

In that season, God was dealing with us about the **loss** that comes from turning our attention backward — the loss of progress, the loss of clarity, the loss of growth, the loss of opportunity.

In Genesis 19, God sends angels to rescue Lot and his family from Sodom and Gomorrah, cities known for pride, excess, and sexual immorality. They are commanded to flee and *not look back* as a sign of obedience and trust in God’s plan. Lot’s wife disobeys, turns back, and becomes a pillar of salt—symbolizing how her heart was still tied to the life she was leaving behind. Her action reflects a lack of faith and unwillingness to fully move forward with God. The story is often used to illustrate the consequences of clinging to the past, disobedience, and failing to trust God. This leads to the message question: “**What has looking back cost you?**”

We looked at Lot’s wife — and I shared that it wasn’t just her **eyes** that turned back.

It was her **heart**, her longing, her emotional attachment to what God was saving her from.

That message was about **recognizing the cost**:

- **Missed opportunities** → When we keep our eyes on what was, we can’t see what God is doing now.
- **Delayed development** → Growth stalls when we stay where God told us to move from.

- **Trying to carry what God was trying to cut** → Old attachments can weigh down new assignments.
- **Returning to what no longer fits your calling** → Going back keeps us from stepping into who we're becoming.
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- Looking back can cost you forward progress. Dwelling on past mistakes, failures, relationships, and success or even past comfort can trap us in regret, guilt, or old mindsets. Resulting in negative stuck patterns of thoughts and behaviors. The past should be a teacher, not a destination. We honor God best by learning from yesterday while choosing to move with Him today.

I believed that was the assignment. I believed God had concluded that chapter.

But as I prepared for this final Sunday of the year, the Spirit of God made something **very clear** to me:

This word is not finished — because some hearts are not finished.

The question this time is **not**:

“What did looking back cost you?”

The question now is:

“Are you still looking back — and what is it costing you now?”

Because some did not just look back.

Some **stopped moving forward.**

And when movement stops... things get quiet.

Not because peace has settled in.

Not because breakthrough has arrived.

But because **retreat has replaced obedience.**

This is not a word of condemnation — this is a word of **alignment**.

This is God, in His mercy, saying:

“I will not let you walk into a new year with an old posture.”

- Ephesians 4:20-24 NKJV

20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

In **Ephesians 4:20–24**, the one speaking is **the Apostle Paul**.

He is writing a letter to the believers in **Ephesus**—the **church at Ephesus**—instructing them about Christian living. In this section, Paul is:

- **Teaching**
- **Correcting**
- **Urging transformation**
- **Calling them to live differently** because they now belong to Christ

Even though Paul is the human author, he is speaking **under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit** (2 Timothy 3:16) “16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for [a]instruction in righteousness,” which means this instruction carries **God’s authority**, not just Paul’s opinion.

So Before we step into what's next,
we must confront where we **settled**, where we **stopped**,
and where our hearts have stayed behind.

And that is why the assignment today is titled:

STILL LOOKING BACK? COUNT THE COST.

Psalm 52 (KJV)

- 1** Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually.
 - 2** Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
 - 3** Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah.
 - 4** Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue.
 - 5** God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.
 - 6** The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him:
 - 7** Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.
 - 8** But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.
 - 9** I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.
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When we read Psalm 52, we expect noise — but what we hear is exposure.

This is not a storming psalm; this is a **revealing psalm**.

A psalm that confronts the places where people **appear strong**,
appear stable, appear secure...
yet are rooted in the **wrong refuge**.

David is addressing a person who is outwardly composed — inwardly misplaced.

#1 “If your storm is unusually calm this season, it may be because you stopped moving forward and started looking back.”

David begins,

“Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?”

There is confidence — but it is **misplaced**.

There is calm — but it is **misaligned**.

There is no storm — but there is **no obedience**.

 Sometimes the storm stops because the **fight for obedience stopped**.

This was Lot’s wife.

She did not freeze because she was terrified.

She froze because she was **attached**.

She wasn’t confused.

She wasn’t panicked.

She was **settled backward**.

The calm came after she disengaged.

What Does It Mean That Lot’s Wife Was “Settled Backward”?

When we say **she was settled backward**, we are not talking about her *feet* first — we are talking about her **internal posture**.

Her body was moving forward,
but her *heart* was **already home** in the place God was pulling her out of.

She was:

- **Physically leaving**
- **Emotionally lingering**
- **Spiritually resisting**
- **Mentally returning**

She was “settled backward” because her **identity, comfort, belonging, and emotional investment** were tied to Sodom **more than her obedience to God**.

She wasn't just *looking back* — she was **anchored back**.

Think of It Like This:

- Her **steps** were obeying
- Her **spirit** was not
- Her **feet** were fleeing
- Her **affections** were staying
- Her **body** exited the city
- Her **loyalty** didn't

That is what it means to be **settled backward**.

Jesus later warns in Luke 17:32:

“Remember Lot’s wife.”

Why?

Because God isn’t warning us about **glancing** —
He’s warning us about **grieving obedience**.

Lot’s wife didn’t get judged for *curiosity*
She got judged for **connection**.

She wasn’t “interested in the past” —
She was **invested in it**.

Settled Backward = Emotional Residency

A person is **settled backward** when:

- ✓ They left the relationship,
but still defend it in their heart.
- ✓ They’re free on paper,
but still bound in emotion.
- ✓ They quit the habit,
but still crave the identity it gave them.
- ✓ They’re out of the situation,
but the situation is still shaping them.

That’s being **settled backward**.

This Creates a Dangerous Calm

A **false calm** can appear in life when the fight for obedience has stopped.

Not because God sent peace...

But because there's no longer spiritual resistance —
the enemy doesn't fight what isn't moving.

That's the kind of calm that settled backward produces:

- Quiet without breakthrough
- Stability without growth
- **Familiarity without faith**
 - **Familiarity without faith** is when we get close to God but never commit to Him. We know the songs, we know the scriptures, we know the church rhythm—but we've lost the expectation that God can still move. When we become familiar without being faithful, we start treating the miraculous as mundane, and we limit what God wants to release. Jesus' hometown had proximity to Him, but not belief in Him, and it cost them breakthrough (Mark 6:1–6).
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 Final Line for Preaching
 - Familiarity kills hunger.
Faith revives it.
 - Familiarity builds walls.
Faith opens doors.
 - Familiarity watches.
Faith moves.

WHY IT'S DANGEROUS

Because familiarity can **disguise itself** as spirituality.

People think they are fine because they are:

- In the building
- Around believers
- Know the language
- Can quote verses
- Grew up in church

...but there is no **expectation, alignment, obedience, or trust.**

So they become **stagnant, numb, and unmoved**, even while surrounded by the presence of God.

Not all calm is peace —
sometimes it's **the quiet of compromise.**

Example to Share

You can say sadly:

“Some of us left Sodom, but Sodom never left us.
We walked out with our feet —
but not with our focus.
God relocated our life,
but we didn't let Him relocate our loyalty.”

#2 “Peace confirms obedience. Stillness after retreat can feel like peace — but it isn't the same.”

David says,

“You love evil more than good...”

This is not about chaos versus calm — this is about **what you love more.**

God's peace **confirms direction.**

False stillness **confirms comfort.**

📌 Quiet does not always mean God is pleased.

📌 Sometimes it just means we stopped obeying.

Many of us have been here:

- We ask God to remove something.
- He begins to remove it.
- The moment discomfort comes, we rebuke the enemy...
...when it was actually God answering.

And when we surrender the fight — things get quiet.

But that quiet is not peace — it's **pause.**

Peace strengthens obedience.

False calm numbs conviction.

#3 “God’s peace carries movement. Retreat carries quiet.”

- **11 Now faith is the [a]substance of things hoped for, the [b]evidence of things not seen.**
- Hebrews 11 shows that faith isn't passive—it *moves*.
Verse 1 defines faith as the assurance of what we hope for and the evidence of what we cannot see, but the rest of the chapter reveals what that faith *does*. Every story begins with “By faith...” and ends in action: Abel offered, Noah built, Abraham went, Sarah received, Moses chose, Israel walked, Rahab welcomed.

Their belief produced obedience. Their conviction created motion. So while faith starts as an inner assurance, real faith inevitably becomes movement toward God, even when the destination is unseen.

David says:

“He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place...”

This is not punishment — this is **protection**.

God uproots what feels stable but is **misaligned**.

If nothing in your life is requiring faith,
if nothing is stretching you,
if nothing is calling you to trust...

📌 It might mean you **stopped moving**.

God’s peace does not paralyze.
It propels.

“Still Looking Back? Count the Cost.”

David says,

““Here is the man who did not make God his strength...”

The cost of looking back is **misplaced trust**.

Looking back is not about memory —
it’s about **misplaced confidence**.

📌 Trusting comfort instead of Christ.

📌 Trusting familiarity instead of faith.

- 📌 Trusting what once worked instead of what God is working.
- 📌 Trusting emotional attachments instead of direction.

So God asks us today:

- What are you calling peace that is actually avoidance?
 - What stopped challenging you because you stopped obeying?
 - What feels calm because it no longer requires faith?
 - Where did longing replace trust?
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David shifts

“But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God...”

The olive tree is not frantic.

It is not running.

It is not hiding.

It is not hoarding old seasons.

It is **rooted, planted, secure, and alive.**

📌 Letting go is not loss.

📌 Letting go is **re-rooting.**

Still looking back? Count the cost.

“This is not a moment to move your feet — this is a moment to move your heart.”

“If the Spirit has put His finger on something you’ve been holding onto...
if you recognize a quiet that came from retreat, not peace...
stand right where you are.”

“This stand is your yes.
Heaven is witnessing it.”

Father God,

We stand before You at the threshold of one year closing and another opening.

We thank You not only for what You carried us through, but for what You are calling us out of.

Lord, today we surrender every place where our hearts have lingered behind us.

We release attachments to old seasons, old comforts, old identities, and familiar places that no longer serve Your purpose.

Forgive us for mistaking quiet for peace.

Forgive us for settling for calm instead of continuing in obedience.

Forgive us for stopping because moving forward required trust.

Holy Spirit, search us.

Arrest our thoughts.

Expose every longing that competes with Your will.

Reveal what we need to let go of — clearly and gently.

We renounce emotional hoarding, delayed obedience, and divided loyalty.

We choose movement over retreat.

We choose trust over familiarity.

We choose Your peace — the kind that carries us forward.

Uproot anything planted in the wrong soil.

Replant us like green olive trees in the house of God.

We step into the new year clean, aligned, and free.

No longing behind us.

No hesitation within us.

No fear before us.

We will not look back.

We will move forward with You.

In Jesus' name — **Amen.**

DECLARATION FOR THE NEW YEAR

 *(Repeat after me / Declare over the people)*

We will not carry old longings into new assignments.

We will not mistake calm for calling.

We will not trade obedience for comfort.

We will not settle where God told us to move.

Our trust is not in what was familiar —
our trust is in the mercy of God ahead of us.

We are planted, not paused.

Rooted, not retreating.

Obedient, not divided.

We step forward with clarity.

We move with courage.

We walk in peace that **carries movement.**

This year, we move forward clean.

We leave behind what cannot go with us.

We trust God fully with what lies ahead.

In Jesus' name — **Amen.**

