

## If You Could Rewrite History ...

History can change on the smallest of events. So can our lives.

Many historians believe the outcome of the Civil War would have been different if it not been for the smallest of events—an accident. On September 9, 1862, General Robert E. Lee issued Special Order 191. In the early days of his invasion of Maryland, Lee sent this order outlining his plans to move the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee laid out the movement and timing for the divisions to follow in order to meet up again. His strategy would give his army the upper hand over General McClellan and the Army of the Potomac. Copies were made and sent out by couriers to his leaders.

Four days later, a Union soldier came upon the area where the Confederates led by General Hill had just vacated. He discovered an envelope with three cigars wrapped up in paper. The paper turned out to be a copy of Lee's Special Order 191, carelessly dropped by a courier. The Union soldier took his discovery back to his commander, and Lee's written orders describing troop movements were soon placed in the hands of General McClellan.

The Confederates had lost the element of surprise; the Union was able to anticipate their moves and they were ready. The tables turned. The historian James McPherson outlines what could have happened if Lee's plans were never discovered. Lee would've marched into the North and taken Gettysburg. The Northern states, led by Democrats who wanted peace, would've voted out Lincoln. Even the British, seeing the Union falter, would've been eager to avenge their humiliation in the American Revolution and perhaps make a grab for their former colonies.

Please don't read this as if I regret those plans were found. My point is that we can speculate all day about how things might've been different, but in the end, the history we have is the history we live with. Of course, that doesn't keep people from playing the historical what-if game. Several years ago, I read a novel of alternative history. The book *How Few Remain* by Harry Turtledove is a story where those cigars and Lee's plans were *not* discovered. In Turtledove's imagination, the South won, Lincoln became a socialist, and the Mormons ... well, it was a dumb book.

We can't rewrite history.

We all wish we could rewrite our own history from time to time. We look at poor decisions, mistakes, and poorly chosen words and think, "*If I could do that over again, I'd do such-and-such instead.*" I have previously written about the What If game, where we dredge up events in our lives and wonder what life would be like had we done something different.

It's OK to review a mistake and determine what you would do differently next time. That's turning it into a learning experience. But too often we rehearse those events, speculate how different life would be if we hadn't blundered, and conclude by beating ourselves up for being a failure.

If you find yourself playing that game, I'll admit to one thing: yes, you're right. Things would be different today. Maybe better ... and maybe worse. But it's useless to play that game and rewrite history in your imagination.

If there's something you can correct, by all means do so. If there's something to confess to God, do so. Seek His forgiveness—and then move on.

David blew it big time in his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. He confessed his sin (see Ps. 51), but he embraced the forgiveness of God and moved on.

"How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How joyful is a person whom the Lord does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!" (Ps. 32:1-2).

Failure in the past does not make you a failure. You have no need to hide your past or rewrite your history. Move on with Christ.

"Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

History is settled and in the past. But you can move forward in the forgiveness and grace of Christ.