

When Our Past Still Affects Us

We are all products of our past in many ways. How we were raised, our childhood, our own poor choices and sin, traumatic events Each of these shape us and have a huge affect on us, and many of us are not willing to see it.

Q: Is this really a big deal, P. David? I see people blaming their behavior on their past, not taking responsibility and don't you think we just need to forget the past and focus on the present? Didn't the Apostle Paul say "I forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead?"

Yes Paul did say that but it is important to note the context: he is talking about all the things in his past that he thought would make him acceptable to God: being a religious person, obeying the OT law, being a Pharisee and then he realized these things were but rubbish to make him right with God and only through the blood of Jesus could he be made right with God.... those things in his past he just needs to forget and stop trusting in and just look to Jesus. He was not referring to past things that were still affecting him today in a negative manner, and that is what we are talking about.

I do agree with you Steve that we should not go back to our past in terms of blaming things on our past or using it as an excuse for sin or carnal behavior: like the person who says well you know I had a tough childhood so you just need to understand that I am prone to depression and I have a right to be miserable and treat you like trash because of my painful childhood. Our past is never to be a license to sin or mistreat people!!!

What I am talking about is a proper going back to the past when it is something that is affecting us today and before we can move on and get healing we need to go back and see the connection.

For example, if my basement is leaking and it has something to do with how the foundation of my house was built years ago, then I need to go back, find out how it was built and that will help me in determining how to fix it so that in the present and future, my house doesn't leak any more. Many people have leaking houses because of things in their foundation.

Stat: many say that about 80% of the human personality is formed by the age of 6.

Q: what are the most common areas in which someone's past affects them now?

1. How they were raised: everything about their home life as a child: view of marriage, go to church or not? Roles in marriage, expectations for marriage, siblings, how money was handled, how holidays were celebrated.....

The way we are raised forms our norms and expectations: what we view as normal and what we expect as adults: couple gets married and expects that the husband will take out the trash, but his mom took out the trash when he grew up.

2. Traumatic events: I know a woman who lost her parents in a car accident as a child and she had a huge fear of traveling – still does. House burned down during the night: trouble sleeping.
3. Abuse: anyone abused emotionally, verbally, sexually or physically will be deeply affected in their life now unless there has been counseling and healing. Those verbally abused often have a very low view of self.
4. Your own sin or mistakes: sexually active as a teen to keep the boy from breaking up can significantly shape that person's view of relationships and even sexuality.
5. One more thing worth mentioning: the earlier we experience difficult or painful or traumatic events the more we are not able to properly handle or interpret them. As children we are obviously very immature and more prone to misinterpret, see abnormal as normal, and just not have the resources to properly deal with it and thus we form our view of life from these and that can really skew things.

(James Dobson says that those who develop multiple personalities are because they experience something so painful that they don't have a category to place it in and thus form another alter personality so as to deal with it without going crazy.

Q: Can you give us an example of someone you have helped where their past still affected them?

Yes. One of the most common is those who really struggle with trusting God or accepting that God loves them. When I ask about their past and especially their relationship with their father or other authority figures in their life, it is not uncommon to find a very distant father, non affectionate, performance oriented and then I begin to ask their view of God and it is of a distant, non loving, rules oriented, performance based God. So then I help them work through the past, see the way that has affected their view of God, and then re-orient their view of God based on Scripture

Another example would be a woman I counseled who really struggled with depression We traced the cause to a divorce where she was deeply hurt and was still plagued by bitterness. Depression has been defined as frozen rage. Now this is not always the case but with her it was.... As she learned to forgive the depression was lifted.

Many who have been abused will have a real hard time trusting people or getting close to people. They keep up a wall of protection.

Here is another one that I hesitate sharing but it is common and may speak to many of our listeners: now this is not always the case but I have found that many obese women have been sexually abused or raped and they purposefully gain weight so that they will not be attractive to a man and thus protect themselves from further sexual abuse.

Q: How do you know if you have issues from your past that still affect you?

Often this comes out when you are getting counseling from someone who is knowledgeable in this. I would say this: if you are struggling with something on a regular basis, like: low self image, depression, some kind of addiction: sexual, alcohol, drugs, eating disorder, shopping addiction..... emotional issues, ongoing relational breakdowns These kinds of things: then it is at least worth asking "What might be the root to this? I want to get to the root and not just deal with this at the surface. I don't want any more bandaids. I may need surgery." And if surgery is needed, then at least considering how our past affects us is worth exploring. Surgery is never fun but if done right will bring about good and healthy results!!!

Q: You mentioned relational breakdowns, with over 50% of marriages ending in divorce, is divorce an thing that can really affect your future?

Absolutely. This is huge, Steve. You cannot go through the pain of a divorce and not be significantly affected. The fact that 2nd marriages have a higher rate of failure shows that most people just repeat the same things in their 2nd or 3rd marriage. Now I know of many that truly learned from the past, got healing, and are in wonderful 2nd marriages. I know of many that have come to Christ through the divorce. Sometimes the rejection of another human drives us to the acceptance and love we can have from God.

Q: Can a relationship with God really help in this area and if so, how?

Yes:

1. Forgiveness for sin
2. Help in trouble
3. Supernatural insight into the connection with the past
4. Healing for anything: emotional, relational, physical....
5. Use it to make us more like Jesus and know God better
6. Use us to help others: wounded healers

One of the most wonderful things about Christianity and a relationship with Jesus is that there is nothing in our past that God is unwilling to forgive and heal us of. God is the master at taking the sin and hurt and negatives of the past and forgiving and healing and even using it for good.

Q: What scriptures would offer in this area?

Joel 2:25-26

25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

KJV

Romans 8:28

Gen. 50:20 (Joseph: what man meant for evil, God meant for good)

2 Cor. 1 comforts us that we may comfort others... Last week: Diane's story

God redeemed the Apostle Paul's past and used him to reach many because of his past, as horrible as some of it was: killed Christians

Psalms God is a very present help in time of need.

Ps. 139 He knows it all! Nothing is hidden from Him. He wants to uncover things to heal them and not to bring misery.

Q: What is the process of healing?

1. Willing to face the past and get help

Jack Deere says that, “what we can’t talk about owns us.” Both what we have done and what has been done to us are given power when they are hidden. Walking in the light as He is in the light means walking in truth.

2. Properly uncover the past: going back to the time or event
3. Discover the lies you believed with that event or time
4. Invite God to reveal his truth and heal you. Replace those lies with truth. Jn. 8:32 the truth will set you free.
5. Accept the truth and obey it: truth about God, truth about forgiveness, truth about honesty, truth about others

Example: I know a family who had a terrible childhood, divorce, verbally and some physical abuse from his dad – 2 of the children have repeated the same mistakes and just continuing the unhealthy cycle but one of the children has become a Christian, been willing face head on his past, has forgiven his father, and is in a good marriage and really doing a great job of parenting. The difference is the Lord and the willingness to really face the past and deal with it. he does have struggles at times resorting to past ways of dealing with things – either avoidance or with anger, but when it creeps up he recognizes it and seeks to hand it over to the Lord.

This brings up something very important: the more we are aware of unhealthy things in our past, the sharper we can be at recognizing when our response to something is not what it should be and might be connected to our past, and then once we recognize this we can adjust our response.

Ex. If you had parents that would always run from conflict and not talk about it... you are in conflict in your marriage and find yourself fleeing/leaving the scene/not talking...this is not good and you will need to make a conscious effort to not do this.

Patterns are established early in life and it is hard to break free from old patterns.